

[R5131 : page 355]

## IN DREAMLESS SLEEP DEAD AWAIT CHRIST'S RETURN

"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 14:3.

THE ERROR OF supposing that men are alive when they are dead lies close to the foundation of every theological error the world over. We have all erred in taking the guess of Plato instead of the Word of God, and we can get rid of our difficulties and theological entanglements only by retracing our steps. Notwithstanding all that we have said and written, calling attention to the words of the Scriptures, the question frequently arises, Do you mean to tell us that our friends do not go to Heaven immediately when they die?

That is exactly what we are endeavoring to demonstrate to be the teaching of the Bible. The Bible alone, of all religious books, teaches that a dead man is *dead*, and knows *nothing*, and that his only hope is in the Divine arrangement through Christ, by a resurrection of the dead – "both of the just and of the unjust." – Acts 24:15.

When we remember that, according to nearly all the religious creeds and theories of the world, 999 out of every thousand pass immediately at death into most horrible sufferings, one would think that all would be glad to promptly accept the Bible testimony, that death is a dreamless sleep until the resurrection awakening. Why anyone should prefer to think of his friends and neighbors and the heathen millions as suffering torture, rather [R5132 : page 355] than to think of them as being asleep, is beyond our comprehension.

The fact probably is that selfishness has such a hold upon the masses that they care and think little respecting others than their near relatives and friends; and the same selfishness inclines them, with infatuation, to believe that they and their relatives, though no better than the rest of mankind, are special favorites of Heaven, and will be

granted the reward of the saints, however unsaintly their lives may have been. Some one has suggested that the ideal prayer for such is:

"God bless me and my wife,  
My son John and his wife;  
Us four, and no more."

In harmony with this we find that when death invades a family circle this selfish egotism assumes that the deceased is acceptable to God as a saint, and wafted immediately to heavenly bliss – regardless of how unsaintly had been the life and how little of the spirit of Christ was ever manifested. The deception is reinforced by the Christian minister called to conduct the funeral service. Whatever he may read from the Bible to the effect that, if there be no resurrection, they that have fallen asleep have perished, his sermon is sure to give the inference that the deceased needs no resurrection, because he has not died, but has merely been transferred from a lower plane of life to a higher one.

Proof of this is not given and not asked. The proof is not given because there is no Scriptural proof to give. It is not asked because the people *are not sufficiently intelligent on religious subjects* to demand a reason and a proof for what is presented to them. The remedy for all this will come when we become more intelligent, more reasoning. No minister of Christ should be abashed to be asked the reason for his faith. St. Peter exhorted that every Christian should be so thoroughly informed respecting the Divine Message as to be able to give a reason to whoever would ask concerning his own faith and his presentations to others.

Here note our text. In it the Master says not a word about our going to Him, but quite the contrary – that he will come again and receive us unto Himself. This is in full accord with the teachings of the Apostles. Do they not tell that at the second coming of Christ the resurrection of the Church will be the first item in order; that then that which was sown in weakness will be raised in power; that sown in

dishonor will be raised in glory; that sown an animal body will be raised a spirit body; and that so we shall ever be with the Lord? Do they not tell us that this will be an instantaneous change? Is it not styled an awakening from the sleep of death?

Hearken to St. Paul: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (seventh trumpet); for the trumpet shall sound," "and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together to a meeting with the Lord in the air." (I Cor. 15:51,52; I Thess. 4:16,17.) How plain, how simple! That will be the first meeting of the Church with her Lord. All of her members dying before that time will "sleep," while those dying since that time will not need to sleep and wait for the glorious change. But, says one, does not the second coming of Christ take place whenever His holy ones die? Does He not immediately come to receive them unto Himself?

Surely only a very lame theory could seek to bolster itself up by such a perversion of the Scriptures. If Christ were to come every time one of His saintly ones dies, would it not mean *many comings* instead of merely *a second coming*? And even if His faithful were very few indeed, does it not seem that this would keep the Redeemer busy coming and departing every few minutes?

Only crass ignorance of the Bible could excuse any such misapplication of its teachings. Not merely one statement of the Scriptures bears upon this subject, but hundreds of statements of Scripture, by Jesus and the Apostles; and all these contradict any such thought.

### **"NO MAN HATH ASCENDED TO HEAVEN"**

Hearken to Jesus' words, "No man hath ascended up to Heaven." (John 3:13.) Only the Son of Man has ever been in heaven. He has ascended up where He was before, with additional glory and honor.

He is now preparing a place for His Bride class and preparing the Bride class for the place – the place of honor at His own right hand. He is overseeing her experiences and causing all things to work together for her good, that she at His Second Coming may be prepared and be accepted as His Bride and granted a share in His glory, honor and immortality.

It is in full harmony with this that a little later on the Great Teacher declared that all the dead are in the grave, and that at His second advent He will first call forth His faithful ones to the perfection of life; and later will call forth the remainder of mankind, not as yet found worthy of life, that they may have an opportunity, a testing as respects their worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life on the human plane.

Hear His assurance again respecting His faithful ones – that they shall share in *His* resurrection, the Chief Resurrection, to glory, honor, immortality, on the spirit plane. He said, "Blessed and holy are all they that have part in the First Resurrection; they shall be priests unto God and Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." – Rev. 20:6.

Be it noted that in all these assurances the Church is spoken of as a class, all of whom will enter into glory [R5132 : page 356] together, at Christ's second coming, and not separately, as each may die. True, each has an individual trial or testing to determine whether or not he or she will be accounted worthy, or fitted for a place in the glorious Body of Christ, in the glorious Bride company, but the statement is repeatedly made that we shall be *glorified together*, that we shall have part in the one resurrection.

### **"DAVID NOT ASCENDED TO HEAVEN"**

In full accord with all the foregoing is St. Peter's statement on the Day of Pentecost: "For David is not ascended into the heavens"; "his sepulchre is with us unto this day." (Acts 2:34,29.) St. Peter's words imply that if King David had ascended to Heaven he would have no

sepulchre on earth. Similarly, we might say of all of the Prophets, and of all other persons that, if once they ascended to the heavenly plane, they could not be said to have any sepulchre on earth, for the very thought connected with the word *sepulchre* is that of a personality awaiting a resurrection, awaiting deliverance from the state and condition of death. So the Scriptures always refer, not to a resurrection of the living, which would be an absurdity, but to a resurrection of the dead.

Note the connection in which the Apostle Peter uses this expression: "David is not ascended into the heavens." He had just called attention to the fact that David prophesied of the resurrection of Jesus. In the prophecy he personated Jesus, and said, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in Sheol (Hades), nor suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." (V. 27.) St. Peter argues that this was not true of David, that he did see corruption, that his soul *was* left in Sheol, and is still left there, and will not be reclaimed until Messiah, in the resurrection morning, shall call him forth.

### **"BE WITH ME IN PARADISE"**

But, says some one, did not the dying thief go with Jesus to Paradise the very day in which they both died? And if so, does not this prove that all in harmony with God go to heaven when they die, whatever may be the condition of others in death?

No, we have made a stupid blunder and misinterpretation of our Redeemer's dying words to the thief. The wrong thought being in our minds we misinterpreted in harmony therewith. And our interpretation has done an immense amount of harm. Thousands of people have been encouraged to continue a life of sin, trusting that with their dying breath they may have the opportunity of saying, "God be merciful to me," and then be immediately ushered into glory, honor and immortality, as joint-heirs with the Savior, and in as honorable a station as those who "have fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas" of trial and persecution and self-denial.

What a travesty of Justice to suppose such an application of this principle! For instance, two ungodly persons quarrel. Both draw revolvers and fire; one dies instantly; the other, the worse of the two, lives a moment, in which he says, "God, be merciful to me." Then, theoretically, he passes into glory, while his victim, not having the opportunity for a cry for mercy, we are told by the same theory, is doomed to endless torture.

Note the circumstance. (Luke 23:39-43.) Jesus hung between two thieves, one of whom joined with the multitude in railing at Him as an imposter, crying out, "Yes, if you be the Christ, save yourself and us from death." The other, of better heart, honestly admitted his own guilt and the guilt of his comrade, but defended Jesus, declaring that He was innocent. Following this, he addresses Jesus. We paraphrase his words: "Lord, I have defended you against an unjust attack; remember this poor thief if you ever have an opportunity to do a kindness to me in return. I heard you before Pilate say that you have a Kingdom, but not of this Age; some heavenly Kingdom, I therefore presume. I know little about such matters, but from what I have seen of you I can well surmise you King of such a Kingdom. My request is, 'Remember me, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.'"

To this Jesus replied, "Verily, verily (so be it, so be it, as you have asked) – verily, I say unto thee this day (this dark day, in which it would appear that I have not a friend in Heaven or on earth – this dark day in which **[R5133 : page 356]** I am crucified as a malefactor, a falsifier and a blasphemer – I say unto thee this day), thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

On the day of their dying all three went to Hades, to Sheol, to the tomb, to the state of the dead. The two thieves still remain there, and are amongst those mentioned by the Prophet Daniel when he refers to those "who sleep in the dust of the earth," who will come forth in the resurrection morning. (Daniel 12:2.) But Jesus arose from Sheol, from Hades, from the tomb, from the state of death, on the third day. He had

not been to Paradise, for Paradise is not even yet in existence. He had not been to Heaven, for He had been *dead*. Let us hear His own words to Mary on the morning of His resurrection: "I have not yet ascended\*\*\*to My Father, and your Father, to My God, and your God." (John 20:17.) Could anything be plainer, simpler, more harmonious?

### **"DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST"**

Ah, says one, I have great faith in St. Paul, and I remember his words: "I am in a strait between two things: having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. 1:23.) If St. Paul expected to depart and be with Christ, why is it not reasonable to suppose that he did so, and that all others, at least of the saintly, at death so depart and pass at once into the presence and fellowship of Jesus?

Yet such a misunderstanding of St. Paul's words and thoughts are excusable in view of the general trend of Christian thought on this subject for centuries, and in view of the error made in this case by the translators. We are not faulting the translators, because they had the erroneous thought firmly embedded in their minds and presumably were trying to make the Apostle here say what they conscientiously thought he ought to say.

But what we are interested in knowing is, What *did he say* on the subject?

Let us read the Apostle's words critically. He was in a strait between two things – whether he would prefer to live and suffer further for the Truth's sake, and assist the brethren, or whether he would prefer to die and rest from his labors. Between these two positions he had no choice. But there was a third thing – and if this had been a possibility he would have had no difficulty in deciding – he had a real, positive desire respecting it; neither of the things which



were possible to him would have stood in comparison at all, this third thing would have been so desirable.

Now what was this third thing? It was not to live and suffer and help the brethren, nor was it to die and be at rest from his labors. The third thing, according to a literal translation, is expressed thus: "I have a desire for the *returning*, and being with Christ, which is far better" – far better than either living under the present trying conditions or dying, sleeping, resting and waiting for the Kingdom.

But, says one, by what authority do you render the [R5133 : page 357] word *depart* by a word of very opposite meaning, namely *return*. We answer that we give this rendering on the authority of the Greek text. The Greek word is *analousai*; it is found in one other place in the Bible, and there it is rendered *return*. In this other case there can be no question as to the proper translation. – See Luke 12:36.

Let us, then, dear fellow-Christians, turn from the follies of the Dark Ages and take the inspired words of Jesus, the Apostles and Prophets, and have, indeed, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for the spirit of heaviness," in respect to the understanding of the Heavenly Father's Program. Thus we will find fulfilled in us more and more the Master's prayer: "Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth."

=====