

THE HOPE AND ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Of all the questions and studies that can occupy the minds of men, none is more important than the one raised by Job: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

All nature teaches us that our life is more than so much water poured on the ground. Solomon said, "To every thing there is a time and a season." All created things appear to die, and to come forth again, perhaps in different forms. Of all elements none are more plentiful than water and air. They can be defiled, or contaminated, but not destroyed. In due time, they are purified, and returned to use. Trees, shrubs, grass and flowers may wither, shed their leaves and go into sleep, but they waken again. A seed planted in the earth will first decay in its outward body, so that the germ of life may sprout, and come forth with a new body. Everything visible, from the smallest insect to the mightiest mountain, is undergoing constant change, and the atoms or materials of which they are formed returned to Mother Earth. The Earth loses nothing.

Since man is the chief of God's creation, it seems altogether reasonable that he should have a future life. Our very flesh and spirit cry out against death, as being the end

of all things. Our existence is often so discouraging and pointless that it would have no meaning or purpose if it did not reach beyond this life. We think of God as all-powerful, ever-present, unchangeable from everlasting to everlasting. He created man to have mastery over the earth and to honour his Maker. Man was formed in the likeness or image of God in this that he was given an intelligence far above the brute creation, the ability to think, reason and communicate by speech with his fellow mortals. The soul is that spiritual part of man's being, which is not destroyed by death. The spirit of the beast goes downward, but the spirit of man goes upward, to God who gave it. Surely God would not be satisfied with the imperfect homage we give Him in a brief lifetime, and then allow us to disappear like the light of a candle when it is blown out. Since nature, reason, and the longings of our souls convince us that we shall live again, we turn for confirmation to the Word of God, which is truth, and divine revelation, that we may be given a little insight into the hidden wisdom and the mystery of life and death.

The doctrine of recovery from death, to an endless life, is unfolded gradually in the

Scripture. The earliest patriarchs may have understood that there would be a future life beyond the grave, but they left no record of their belief. From Job, who may have lived before Moses, we have the first definite expression: - "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Many centuries later the Savior, in speaking of the resurrection, declared that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living. These fathers of Israel were therefore not to be regarded as extinct, but their lives were only suspended for a time and would be returned to them again.

Moses certainly believed in everlasting life, for on one occasion, when pleading with God for the forgiveness of Israel's sins, he even offered to have his name blotted out of the book which the Lord had written. When we come down to David, who was king, poet and prophet, and we find more sayings that have strengthened and inspired God's people. The beautiful 23rd Psalm says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In the 16th

Psalm David not only foretold the brief stay in the grave of the Savior, and of His resurrection, but he gave assurance that, at the right hand of God there are pleasures for evermore. Psalm 17:15 has been the text at more than one funeral, - "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness." And David's own confidence in a joyful resurrection is that of every true believer: "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth."

The prophets also bear testimony to a future life. Hosea said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." Daniel was granted a vision of the Ancient of days, sitting in judgment, before whom the Son of man came to receive an everlasting kingdom. He learned that many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And to Daniel it was said, "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Isaiah was

given these comforting words: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." Some of his expressions may refer to the joyous Kingdom of Christ on earth, but could also describe the future. For example:- "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off." "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

So much for the Old Testament. The New is an account of the birth, life, teaching, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God, and the activities and testimony of His apostles and disciples. In Him are fulfilled all of the types, figures and prophecies of the Old Testament; and by His triumph over death and the powers of hell, He gives assurance of immortality to His followers. "Because I live ye shall live also." It could not be that the Prince of Life should be held by death, for then all of our hopes would have been buried with Him. But He showed that He had power to lay down His life, and to take it up again. At the time of Christ's death and

resurrection, darkness was over the land for at least three hours; the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom; the earth did quake and the rocks were rent, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, came out of the graves, went into Jerusalem and appeared unto many. What God did at that time He can easily do again.

Jesus came to appoint unto us a Kingdom- a Kingdom that is not of this world, although it is begun in this life, in the hearts of those who believe. By teaching and example He gave us to understand that this present world is but temporal, not to be compared with the glories of the everlasting Kingdom, and that we should become willing to "sell all" in order that we may possess eternal life. He said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." This refers to the new birth - our rising from dead works to serve the living God; for immediately afterwards, He spoke of the bodily resurrection and the Judgment Day when He said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and

they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

He makes it plain, too, that He shall come the next time in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, and that He shall sit upon the throne of His glory, with all nations before Him. He will divide, as a shepherd does, the sheep from the goats, setting His sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left. To them on the right hand He will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Those on the left shall receive the terrible sentence: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Jesus urged His followers to be watchful and prayerful, so that “that day” should not come upon them unawares. He prepared them for temptations and persecutions, promising them that, by His Holy Spirit He would be in them and with them, even unto the end of the world. He said, “I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also.” He compared their sufferings in this present world to that of a woman in childbirth, who has anguish while in travail, but who forgets her suffering when the child is delivered. “And now,”

He said, “Ye therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” Well might the evangelist, John, sum up the account he wrote of his Master's stay on earth by saying that what was written was intended “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.”

The writing of the Apostles to the Church in different places are all directed to instruct, confirm, warn and comfort the spiritual children of God in their high calling. They all show us that we should be willing to deny ourselves and suffer a little in this life, that we may keep our souls unto life eternal. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians 15th chapter, draws aside the veil somewhat, answering the question, “How are the dead raised up?” and “With what body do they come?” In I Thessalonians 4th chapter, he tells of the order in which the dead and the living shall rise and be changed, and “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Peter foretells the destruction of the elements and the earth by fire. He says, “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly

and the sinner appear?” His hope for the believer is, “We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” John's assurance is, “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” And last of all the Revelator speaks of the blessed state of the servants of God when He writes, “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

Dear brethren and sisters, -- all seekers of truth and any who may be “almost persuaded,” - we have sufficiently proved, from the Word of God, that He has prepared for His creature, man, a state of eternal blessedness which he can attain by faith in God's only begotten Son, and obedience to His Word and Spirit. He has granted to us exceeding great and precious promises. Let us try to show our thankfulness by a humble submission to His gentle spirit. “He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee.” Let us remember, too, that the Bible teaches eternal punishment, as well as eternal life. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living

God.” Those who despised Moses’ law died without mercy. How much greater punishment will they be worthy of, who tread under foot the Son of God? No, God is not mocked; and we shall reap as we have sown. May we ever strive to sow to the Spirit, that we may of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

W. I. T.