

New Edition.

THE DEAD: WHERE ARE THEY?

Notes of an Address
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The Dead: Where are They?

“Man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?”—Job xiv. 10.

NO more anxious question could possibly engage the human mind. It comes very near to us all, both as regards our friends and as regards ourselves. Who amongst us has not had to say, “Farewell” to loved ones? With breaking hearts, it may be, we have watched them passing from us into the great beyond, and, as we realise that we shall never again greet them upon earth, we are constrained to enquire, where are they? Then we ourselves are made conscious that we are here only for a while, flitting across the stage of human affairs, and soon to follow in the path of the generations which have gone before us. Every silver hair whispers to us that our sojourn here is short.

Where can we obtain light concerning this great question? Man is admittedly powerless here. Of himself he can know absolutely nothing outside his present environment. Some will tell us that they obtain a lot of information concerning the invisible world by attending spiritualistic seances. There, they say, they get into communication with the departed, and learn direct from them the truth as to the spirit realm. No greater delusion was ever prepared by the Devil for the children of men. It is not denied that persons do hold conversation with spirits, but it is not with the dead they thus speak, but with demons who personate them. This awful sin is sternly denounced in Isaiah viii. 19-20 and elsewhere in Holy

Scripture. The Spirit of God asks indignantly, "Should not a people seek unto their God?" Only from God, through His Word, can we learn anything reliable concerning the world beyond.

In Luke xvi. 19-31 we have a striking story from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sketches for us the careers of two men whose ways on earth He had noted; and then, both having died, He lifts the veil, and shows them to us upon the other side thereof. Who so competent to declare eternal realities as He whose everlasting home was the Father's bosom, and who came here to make Him known? There are several things distinctly taught in this solemn narrative to which I ask your earnest attention.

First, we learn that there is a life beyond this world.

We see the rich man in his luxury and the beggar in his misery on earth, and then we see both in another sphere. The grave had not ended the history of either of them. Death is not cessation of being. There are three kinds of death connected with man as a sinner—spiritual death, physical death, and the second death. The first represents man's moral condition of alienation from God, as we read in Ephesians ii. 1, "dead in trespasses and sins"; the second is the dissolution of the body; and the third is the lake of fire. But none of these means ceasing to exist. The man spiritually dead is full enough of energy in evil, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." The man physically dead still lives unto God, as was shown at the burning bush when Jehovah spoke of the long departed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the present tense (Luke xx. 37-38). Even the lake of fire does not mean ceasing to exist, for when the Devil is cast in there a thousand years after the Beast and the False Prophet he finds these transgressors in that place still (Revelation xix. 20; xx. 10). Death is separation. The man spiritually dead is morally separated from God, not a motion of his being going out towards Him; the man physically dead is separated from his body, and from all the

associations connected therewith ; and he who experiences the second death finds himself separated from God and all that is blessed for evermore.

Second, We learn that there is consciousness in the life beyond.

Some tell us that men lie passive until the resurrection, and press the word "sleep" in support of their notion. But "sleep" is only predicated of the body in Scripture ; never of the soul. Lazarus was "comforted." This was conscious blessedness. For him, beggary, sores, and hunger were left behind for ever. The rich man, too, was conscious. He was in pain ; and as he saw the bliss of Lazarus he experienced a sense of loss ; memory was lively with him ; and he was filled with fear for his five brethren still alive upon the earth. Someone will perhaps object that the Bible says, "The dead know not anything" (Ecclesiastes ix. 5). True, but in what connection is the passage found ? Texts divorced from their context can be made to prove any heresy you please. The writer in Ecclesiastes is occupied with things "under the sun," and it is of these things he speaks when he says, "the dead know not anything." A man who may have been the vigilant head of a large business on earth knows nothing more of it, as to its prosperity or otherwise, when he leaves the present world behind him. And so with all departed ones as far as human affairs are concerned.

Third, we learn from this story that there are two distinct and opposite conditions in the unseen world.

Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom ; the rich man was in torments. The Lord was speaking from the Jewish standpoint when He spoke of "Abraham's bosom." Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and the depository of the promises ; to be blessed in company with him was the

expectation and hope of his seed. But since the day of Luke xvi. Christ has died and risen again, and has gone up as Man into God's glory. Accordingly the blessedness of sleeping believers is now described in wholly different terms: "to depart and to be with Christ is far better": "absent from the body, present with the Lord" (Phillip. i. 23; 2 Corinthians v. 8). Neither the rich man nor Lazarus had yet reached eternal circumstances. The rich man was in Hades, not yet in Gehenna: and neither he nor Lazarus had yet experienced resurrection. The one will be as a complete man (spirit and soul and body) in the lake of fire for ever: and the other, as a complete man, will find his everlasting home in the Father's house. Every believer is predestinated to be with, and like, the First-born Son on high.

Fourth, We learn that in the unseen world conditions are unalterable.

We hear Abraham saying: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." These solemn words remind one of Rev. xxii. 11: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Great transformations take place here below; through faith in the Gospel men are continually passing "from death unto life" (John v. 24); but when the border-line is passed, every man's condition is fixed for evermore. Modern theologians, however, would have a good deal of comfort to offer such an one as the rich man. Some would tell him that God, as the great universal Father, will ultimately have all His creatures in a state of salvation, some reaching His glory by way of the cross, others by way of purgatorial fires; another school of interpreters would flatly contradict this, and say that after the judgement of the great white throne the lost will be extinguished, blotted out of existence entirely; others again would offer to pray for the rich man

“in Church,” assuring him that there is great efficacy in prayers for the dead. But none of these modern lies were known either to Abraham or to the lost soul to whom he was speaking. Not a ray of hope can be discovered in Abraham’s reply to the sufferer’s appeal.

The question naturally arises, what brought this man to so fearful a doom? Was he one of the vilest of mankind, of whom the Creator would make a special example? Nothing of the kind is stated. Neither drunkenness, adultery, blasphemy, nor Sabbath-breaking are alleged against him. Then what caused his ruin? The simple fact that he lived entirely for the present. So favoured was he with this world’s goods, that he gave himself entirely up to the enjoyment of them, in utter forgetfulness of God and of his own soul. He was a neglecter rather than a rejecter. There are thousands like him in our own day. Friend, whoever you be, note this well: to be sure of Hell you need not take up the commandments of God and systematically violate them one by one; just go on in neglect of God and His Son, and, moral and decent though your life may be, you will be lost for ever. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. ii. 3). The fearful and the unbelieving will be found at last along with murderers, sorcerers, and the like in the lake of fire (Rev. xxi. 8).

There is one thing more that we learn from this solemn story—that *our only resource is the Scriptures*. In reply to his entreaty that Lazarus should be sent to his living brethren, the rich man was told, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” This means, of course, the sacred writings. Therein is human guilt exposed in all its sinfulness; therein also is the love of God declared, manifested in the gift of His Only-begotten Son. Forgiveness and justification, full and free, are clearly set forth and proposed in the Gospel to all who will believe in the Son. Some of our contemporaries are worse than the rich man, in that they scoff at the idea of Moses and the prophets being the real authors of the books which bear their names. In their benighted eyes neither Moses nor Abraham ever

lived at all. The man of Luke xvi. was not so infidel as this. His only thought was that if something startling could take place, such as Lazarus being sent from the unseen world, his brethren would repent. Alas, for the human heart! When the Lord Jesus, just a little later, really did raise from the dead a man bearing the same name, those around Him were only the more incensed against Him (John xii. 10-11). They did not repent. God's Word alone, bowed to in obedient faith, can produce "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xx. 21).

"God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"
Romans v. 8.

"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezek. xviii. 32).

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah i. 18).

