

IS THERE ANOTHER CHANCE?

OR

Does Death Fix Destiny?

BY W. W. FEREDAY.

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GLASGOW :

PICKERING & INGLIS, 11 Bothwell Circus.

BELFAST :

NORTHERN PUBLISHING OFFICE, 42 Ann Street.

UTTOXETER :

W. W. FEREDAY, 35 New Road.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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A SOLEMN THEME.

THIS paper relates to the future of those who die in their sins, and upon so solemn a theme we dread to pen one single unauthorised word. Human opinion is manifestly worthless here. If all the ecclesiastical authorities of Christendom were to come together, and were to arrive at an absolutely unanimous opinion upon the subject, it would be altogether without value. Here, if anywhere, we need light from heaven. God alone can speak with knowledge of the life beyond. He alone knows rightly what sin deserves. In His word alone is authority for our souls.

The theme is overwhelming. Even when speaking of temporal judgment the Saviour wept (Luke xix. 41-44); Jeremiah wished that his head were waters and his eyes a fountain of tears (Jer. ix. 1); and Isaiah realised the deepest inward agitation and distress (Isa. xvi. 11). Paul the Apostle, in view of the ruin, both temporal and eternal, which awaited his unbelieving brethren, experienced great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart; and had even wished himself accursed from Christ for them (Rom. ix. 1-4).

THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

No Christian is called upon to apologise for the divine character in this connection, still less to say what is befitting for God to do. The modern talk that a God of love could not possibly punish sinners eternally is just so much nonsense. It is not for men to say what the Creator should or should not do, but rather to ascertain from His Word what He has said He *will* do. The fact is worth noting that the most vivid statements concerning the wrath to come proceeded from the lips of the Saviour Himself, and from the pen of the Apostle of love (Mark ix. 42-48 ; Luke xvi. 19-31 ; John iii. 36 ; Rev. xiv. 9-11 ; xx. 10-15, etc.).

THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN.

To the Word of God then we turn. Man differs from other created beings in that he is made up of "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess. v. 23). Angels are spirits only (Heb. i. 7) ; animals, etc., consist of soul and body (Gen. i. 20, margin). The spirit is the seat of the will and of the intelligence—the mental and moral faculties (1 Cor. ii. 11) ; the soul is the seat of the affections and desires (1 Sam. xviii. 1 ; Luke ii. 35 ; Heb. x. 38 ; though sometimes this term is used in the sense of simple personality, as in Ezek. xviii. 4 ; 1 Peter iii. 20) ; the body is the vessel by means of which the spirit and soul express themselves. The word "mortal" is only applied in Scripture to the body ; never to either soul or spirit.

The true life of man is a thing distinct from the body. This was shewn at the beginning. First, Jehovah Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground (*i.e.*, He formed his body) ; then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and thus he became "a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7). With this agree the words of our Lord in Matt. x. 28.

In view of impending persecution He said to His disciples : " Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul ; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Men might kill the body, but the soul was altogether beyond their reach. But when speaking of God, the Saviour drops the word " kill," and substitutes for it " destroy." The soul then can be " destroyed," but not " killed." That this is no mere accidental variation of terms John x. 10 shews conclusively. " The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." Thus to " kill " is one thing ; and to " destroy " is another. We will revert to this point presently.

Many a passage of Holy Scripture shews that the death of the body is not the end of everything for man. Two passages will suffice for our present purpose. In Matt. xxii. 31-32 our Lord insists upon the life of the soul when the body has gone to corruption, by reminding the Sadducees of Jehovah's use of the present tense when speaking to Moses of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of men long gone to the tomb Jehovah said : "*I am* the God of Abraham," etc. " God is not the God of the dead but of the living." Thus men who have said their farewell to earth ages ago are still alive to God in another sphere. The well-known story of the rich man and Lazarus is a remarkably vivid presentation of this solemn truth (Luke xvi. 19-31). The teaching here is so unequivocal that the most desperate efforts have been made to put the passage out of court ; and in order to accomplish this end interpretations of the most grotesque character have been fastened upon it. But let the waves of unbelief dash against it ever so furiously, there the story stands with its twofold picture : first, men *seen* alive upon earth ; and then the same persons *seen* in the world beyond ; in their respective circumstances of bliss and woe, and both *unalterable*.

THE WORD "DESTROY."

We return to the word "destroy." Several words are so rendered in both the Old and New Testaments, but none of them signify annihilation. "Ruin" or "desolation" is meant; the person or thing referred to marred for the purpose for which he or it was made. Just as one might speak to-day of a castle being bombarded and destroyed; no one would suppose the structure to have been absolutely blotted out of existence; but rather that what has happened has rendered it useless either for residence or defence in the future. The word most frequently used in this connection in the New Testament is variously rendered "destroy," "perish," and "lose." A few examples, having reference to other subjects than men's souls, are here appended:

Matt. ii. 13—"Herod will seek . . . to *destroy* Him."

Matt. viii. 25—"Lord, save us: we *perish*."

Mark ix. 41—"he shall not *lose* his reward."

Mark xii. 9—"he will . . . *destroy* the husbandmen."

Luke v. 37—"the bottles shall *perish*."

Luke ix. 56—"the Son of Man is not come to *destroy* men's lives."

Luke xv. 4—"if he *lose* one of them" (his sheep).

Luke xv. 8—"if she *lose* one piece."

1 Cor. i. 19—"I will *destroy* the wisdom of the wise."

1 Pet. i. 7—"gold that *perisheth*."

Let any of these passages be examined, and it will be seen that the thought of extinction of being cannot be entertained for a moment.

“ETERNAL.”

A good deal of clap-trap is current concerning the meaning of the word “eternal.” 2 Cor. iv. 18 is sufficient of itself to indicate its force to the honest mind: “The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” “Eternal” is thus opposed to “temporal.” The one term expresses that which is bounded by time; the other that to which no time limits can be assigned. “Eternal” is applied in Scripture to God Himself (Rom. xvi. 26); to the redemption obtained by the Lord Jesus (Heb. ix. 12); to the life and salvation of believers (John iii. 16; Heb. v. 9); to the glory to which saints are called (1 Pet. v. 10); and to the judgment of the unbelieving (Matt. xviii. 8; xxv. 46; 2 Thess. i. 9; Heb. vi. 2). The word can have but one meaning in the various connections in which the Spirit of God has been pleased to use it.

“FOR EVER AND EVER.”

Twenty times we find the words “for ever and ever” in the New Testament. Any concordance will supply the list. Sixteen times they are applied to God—His being, kingdom, and worship; once they are applied to the reign of the saints; and three times to the punishment of the lost. Let this fact be emphasised: the strongest language known to express *eternity* is used of the divine Being, of the blessedness of believers, and of the torment of unbelievers. If one of these can come to an end, then all must end together, for precisely the same terms are used of all alike.

WHAT IS DEATH?

A few words now as to death. It is not cessation of being. There are three kinds of death connected with man viewed as a sinner—spiritual death, physical death, and the second death. The first represents man's moral condition of alienation from God (Eph. ii. 1) ; the second is the dissolution of the body ; and the third is the lake of fire. But none of these mean ceasing to exist. The man spiritually dead is full enough of energy in evil, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. ii. 2) ; the man physically dead still lives unto God, as Luke xvi. 19-31 ; xx. 37-38 have already shewn us ; and 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 (Rev. xix. 20 ; xx. 10). *Death is separation.* The man spiritually dead is separated from God, not a motion of his being going out towards Him ; the man physically dead is separated from all the associations connected with the body ; and he who experiences the second death finds himself separated from God, and from all that is blessed and holy for evermore.

"HADES" AND "GEHENNA."

"Hades," meaning "the unseen"—the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament "Sheol"—represents the condition of men in the unclothed state. "Gehenna" is the lake of fire, into which all transgressors—Satan, demons, and men—will ultimately be cast. The consciousness of the soul after leaving the body is clearly shewn in such passages as Luke xvi. 19-31 ; Isa. xiv. 9-10 ; Ezek. xxxii. 21 ; Rev. vi. 9-10, all of which represent men as engaged in conversation in

the unclothed state. The word "punishment" could have no meaning as applied to an inanimate or unconscious object. To flog a dead body would be senseless if *punishment* were intended. The fixed and unalterable condition of men who have crossed the border line is solemnly shewn in Luke xvi. 26; Rev. xxii. 11. The latter text affirms that nature in both saved and unsaved will continue unchanged and unchangeable for ever.

"THE SPIRITS IN PRISON."

Men cling fondly to the notion that in some way or other there is hope beyond the grave, and God's blessed word is often wrested in order to fortify their souls in this great delusion. 1 Pet. iii. 18-20 is a favourite passage with such. If Christ preached to the spirits in prison, say they, then there are glad tidings in readiness for men in the invisible world. But Peter affirms no such thing as a Gospel preached to disembodied sinners. Only gross inattention to the Apostle's words could imagine such a thought, so utterly out of harmony with all Scripture. Verse 19 must not be divorced from verse 18. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison," etc. It was not then a personal preaching on the part of Christ at all, any more than in Eph. ii. 17—"came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." This passage refers to present Gospel testimony, beyond all controversy; and manifestly the Apostle does not mean that Christ is preaching in person. So in 1 Pet. iii. 19 Peter says He preached by (or, in) the Spirit. Chap. i. 11 of the same epistle furnishes the key to this.

The Spirit of Christ was in the Old Testament prophets ; by their means His voice was heard amongst men. Now Noah was " a preacher of righteousness " ; Peter expressly says so in his second epistle (chap. ii. 5) ; add to this the statement of Gen. vi. 5 : " My Spirit shall not always strive with man," and we learn conclusively that there was a gracious testimony of the Spirit of Christ proceeding " when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." It is because men were disobedient to this testimony that they are now " spirits in prison," but they were not in the spirit condition when they were addressed. Can anyone suggest a reason why the men of Noah's day, of all the generations of men who have lived and died, should have had a special opportunity of salvation granted to them during our Lord's three days continuance in the disembodied condition? The notion is absurd, upon the face of it. The teaching of this passage may be summarised thus :

WHO PREACHED? Christ, but *by (or, in) the Spirit*. Not Christ's personal spirit in a disembodied state, but the Holy Spirit, who in the same epistle (chap. i. 11) is called " the Spirit of Christ." He by the Spirit spake through Noah.

TO WHOM DID HE PREACH? To the antediluvians, whilst they were alive on the earth in Noah's day. They proved " disobedient," and in consequence their spirits are now in prison.

WHEN DID HE PREACH? " When the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing."

PREACHING TO THE DEAD.

(1 Peter iv. 6).

Some fall back upon the apostle's words in the following chapter: "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men **in** the flesh, but live according to God **in** the Spirit." But this does **not** mean that glad tidings were preached to those persons *after death*. The meaning is that the progenitors of Peter's readers had heard glad tidings in their day as well as themselves, for which they will be held accountable **in** the day of judgment. The statement was rendered necessary by the unfamiliarity of Jewish minds with the subject of the judgment *of the dead*. The judgment *of the quick* (or living) they understood perfectly, the Old Testament teaching it repeatedly. Let this fact too be carefully noted—men **in** the disembodied state are not called "the dead" in Scripture, *for spirits never die*. Our Lord in Luke xx. 38 insists upon this most distinctly.

Naomi's words to her daughter-in-law in Ruth i. 8 may be helpful here as an illustration: "Jehovah deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me." It is superfluous to remark that it was **not** after the men had died the kindness was shewn, but while they were yet living upon earth. So, **in** like manner, the apostle's statement that glad tidings were "preached to them that are dead" means to them that are *now* dead. They heard the preaching while they were alive amongst men.

"IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE."

A few words as to another text. Some ask: "Does not 1 Cor. xv. 22 say, As in Adam all die,

even so in Christ shall all be made alive?" Truly, but when the doctrine of the two heads is perceived, the passage becomes transparent enough. Every man stands connected before God either with Adam or with Christ; with the first man or the Second Man. In each case the whole family is involved in the position and fortunes of its head. Those "in Adam" are under condemnation and death; those "in Christ" have life and righteousness. It is to these latter—the family of grace, believers in the Christ who died and rose again, that 1 Cor. xv. 22 applies, and to no others.

It is here on earth men have their opportunities of divine blessing. When the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brethren, lest they also reached the place of torment, he was told in reply: "They have Moses and the prophets (*i.e.*, the Scriptures); let them hear them." This is where men stand to-day. We have the Scriptures. Therein is declared God's holy abhorrence of sin, and His righteous judgment thereof. Therein too is unfolded the story of His wondrous love in the gift of His beloved Son. On the equitable basis of the Saviour's blood, God is able to take to His heart for ever even the vilest sinner who humbles himself at His feet and believes the Gospel. "Why will ye die?" is His tender appeal to the perishing children of men.

"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John iii. 17-18).