



THEN shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Eccl 12:7)

WHEN Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, *It is finished:* and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30)

The soul of man is eternal – not just the righteous, but the unrighteous as well. Every man, woman, or child who departs this life in the sleep of death spends an eternity somewhere – be it Heaven or Hell. But all have a destination.

No reformed theologian believes it is possible for God to die; yet Christ died on the cross at Calvary. How do we resolve those conflicting facts. Christ was God – the Second Person of the Godhead; but Christ was also human. He suffered and died in His humanity, but He also descended into Hell during those three days in the Garden Tomb in the spirit and set the captives free. The essence of our being is our spirit which is given by God to all born into this world. That spirit does not perish with that physical shell which dies, but returns to God who gave it.

There are ancient heresies arising out of Sabellian sources that believe that God Himself suffered death on the cross (theopassianism). Another teaches that God the Father suffered vicariously through the Son being crucified (patripassianism). These ancient heresies exist today in so-called Oneness churches that deny the reality of the Trinity. But it is a well proven fact that our Lord did indeed suffer and die on the cross for our sins and redemption. The only question is: what was the nature of His death?

Since God cannot die, the death of our Lord must have meaning beyond our usual interpretation of death. As a matter of fact, death in the eyes of the Lord is far different than the common and worldly notion of death. Remember the little daughter of Jairus who suffered death before Jesus had arrived to heal her? There was much mourning and weeping at the home of Jairus when Jesus arrived there. Read the account from the Gospel of St. Mark: *“35 While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? 36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, **Be not afraid, only believe.** 37 And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. 38 And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. 39 And when he was come in, he saith unto them, **Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.** 40 And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. 41 And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, **Talitha cumi;** which is, being interpreted, **Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.** 42 And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. 43 And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.”* (Mark 5:35-43)

The mourners at the home of Jairus knew death, but our Lord knows LIFE. He is *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”* Jesus had told the mourners that the twelve year old daughter of Jairus was not dead, but slept. To our Lord, that which we call death, He called sleep. The body falls asleep at death, but the soul awakens to its new abode. The same is true of Lazarus of Bethany: Hear what our Lord told His disciples after Lazarus had died during the period of four days: *“**Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.** Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, **Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.**”* (John 11:11-15) Notice even our Lord’s disciples could not grasp the meaning of our Lord’s word describing death as a sleep. So, He told them outright, in terms to which they could relate, *“**Lazarus is dead!**”* I believe that even strong-spirited Christians of our day still have difficulty accepting this spiritual reality to which Christ so often made reference.

Do we truly believe the Lord’s own words? *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”* (John 6:47) Please drop you anchor lines into this passage whose depth cannot be fathomed: *“**I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?**”* (John 11:25-26) The question is simple, is it not; but its meaning is profound. 1) Even if the believer is dead in body, we yet live in Christ. 2) If we believe while we yet live, we can never die except for that mortal coil that embraces our souls and spirits. An important truth to note in that passage is the fact that we must believe before we pass the bars of death.

Please recall the death of the blessed Stephen, the first deacon of the New Testament Church: *“59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”* (Acts 7:59-60) The Book of Acts most likely was transcribed by Luke. If so, Luke had learned better to know sleep from death since the disciples doubts before the raising of Lazarus. Stephen fell asleep in Christ.

In a sense, our Lord was buried alive since His spirit did not die. His body did, indeed, die, but never knew corruption. Jesus died in His humanity but not in His Divinity.

There are good Christian people being buried alive around the world, but their loved ones often suffer from a lack of understanding of their present state of being. Poor Beggar Lazarus was laid beside the rich man's gate day in, and day out. Those who laid him there must have cared much for him in being so faithful to bear him there. When he died, I wonder how those caring souls felt in their friend's passing? Review the passage with me:

AND it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, 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. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:22-31)

In the above account, we see that BOTH men died a physical death; but we also see that BOTH lived on after death – one in paradise, and the other in Hell.

Death is only a shadow to those of faith. But it is more than a shadow to those who have no election in Christ. It is a nightmare which broods over their worthless lives every moment. It means the end of every joy and happiness. So a proper understanding of death in the eyes of the Lord should give us comfort and succor.

Today, 6 April 2018, marks the death of a great Russian Christian Ivan Prokhanoff in exile in 1924. Ivan was pronounced dead from a seizure when he was ten years of age. As he lay in the coffin having the final burial rites read over him, he suddenly opened his eyes and began to cry. Prokhanoff later wrote: "*Surely the power of the Omnipotent appointed me to live and to solve a special problem set by Him for my life; another power, the power of death, wanted to cut my life short in its very beginning, but the power of the Omnipotent overcame . . . and I was left to be on earth.*"

Prokhanoff wanted to help his Russian brothers and sisters who suffered in ignorance not helped much by the staid worship of the Orthodox Church. Not wanting to burden his people, he became an engineer in order to pay for his upkeep as a minister to them. Observing the squalid conditions in Russia, he realized no reforms would help unless preceded by a spiritual reform. He wrote: "*No social or political reforms could prove successful unless a moral and spiritual reform in the people themselves was first realized.*" This could easily be said about the America of today. Prokhanoff was jailed often for standing up for Christ in Russia. Just before his death, he wrote: "*As I look back, analyzing the events of the past fifteen years, I cannot but see that every incident, every hindrance, even persecution and imprisonments, served definitely and positively for the growth of the Evangelical Christian Movement in Russia.*"

I pray that every reader of this devotion will live joyously after being BURIED ALIVE!