



**T**HESE things said he: and after that he saith unto them, *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*<sup>12</sup> Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.<sup>13</sup> Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. (John 11:11-13)

The Church has long struggled with the issue of physical death and in what manner it should be related to the people. Of course, the Bible provides all necessary for that obligation. Yet, there still hangs a pall of mystery over the issue of our death.

Our Lord was abundantly clear that the death of a saint is nothing more than a sleep. The body, at death, falls into a deep sleep; but the spirit returns to God who gave it.

How long do we expect our bodies of dust and ashes to lie in the tomb? That question we have not been provided an answer; however, regardless of the time component, it shall be as the *"twinkling of an eye."* *"Behold, I shew 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: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality,*

*then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. (1 Corinthians 15:51-56)*

The soul of man is much like the seed of grain. In life, it is covered with flesh and bones. The seed, too, is covered by a husk and layers of protective tissue. Yet, at the heart of the seed, is a tiny spark of life. The husk and protective linings will deteriorate and provide food for the germinating seed. One day, the gardener will be pleased to see the evidence of the life in that seed break open into the sun of day. Science can define the husk and the embryonic linings of the seed, but they are still at a loss to define that spark of life. The same is true of the believer who dies in Christ. His body turns to dust, but that spark of life which is the spirit suffers no destruction. Instead, it returns to God who keeps the soul in safekeeping until it can be joined again with a perfected body. It matters not how long the body remains in the grave, the seed of life is held in security by the Father. Our understanding of life ends at the grave, but our faith in God and His ability to keep us in His care should not.

*"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?"*

Fairly simple and concise, but pregnant with truth and joy.

My mother was an avid gardener. She loved all manner of flowers many of which I could never recall the names, but one imposing flower was in her garden and beside the entrance of our house whose name I do recall – the Dahlia. What an unusual name, perhaps, but not when you know the history behind the Dahlia.

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Lord Lindsay explored the pyramids of Egypt. Being privileged to open one of the mummies entombed there, they discovered in the hand of the mummy the stem of a bulbous rose. The mummy was estimated to have been 3,000 years old at the time of the excavations. As soon as the wrappings were removed and the flower was subject to the ambient air, it crumbled into dust – all except the seed! This seed was carried to England and planted in the garden of Lord Lindsay. It later sprang up strong and health bearing a beautiful and unusual flower. There were no descriptions in their catalogs of botany to classify the flower.

‘What shall we call this flower,’ wondered Lord Lindsay. It is clearly a flower which had become extinct over those three thousand years that the seed lay dormant in the pyramid.

It was decided the flower should be named after the renowned Norwegian botanist, Christian Dahl – therefore, DAHLIA!

This seed had lain dormant those three thousand years, yet its life was preserved in the heart of the seed. That may be a shadow of how God preserves His people whether living or sleeping in the dust. The key word of hope and joy for every Christian is the word sleep – not death. God created each of us to live forever in eternity. The greatest issue facing each of us is which eternity – that of Heaven, or the fires of Hell.

Whether we sleep in the grave three days, four days (as Lazarus), of 3,000 years buried in the Valley of Moab matters not. Our lives do continue on. Remember poor Moses who was not allowed to step foot in the Promised Land after leading a multitude of whining, mummering Israelites in the Wilderness for forty years. Yet, God took him up Mt. Nebo and allowed him to view the Promised Land from a distance. Moses then “slept with his fathers” and God buried him in the Valley of Moab. How sad, right? Not at all. When do we see Moses next in Holy Scripture? *“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was*

transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them **Moses** and Elias talking with him.” (Matthew 17:1-3) Here, many centuries later, we see Moses on another mountain. He doesn’t appear dead, does he, even if his body is sleeping in the dust? Moses is even talking with the Lord!

There are many mysteries involved with the state of the so-called dead, and many beyond our ability to fully fathom. But one day, we shall come to a perfect understanding of those mysteries. Until then, we simply see through a glass darkly. Please observe both the hope and the mystery revealed by Paul below:

**B**UT if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: <sup>14</sup> And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. <sup>15</sup> Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: <sup>17</sup> And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. <sup>20</sup> But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. <sup>21</sup> For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. (1 Corinthians 15:13-23 (KJV) ... <sup>51</sup> Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. <sup>55</sup> O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. (1 Corinthians 15:51-56)

Perhaps the very best illustration of death is given by our Lord Jesus Christ: *“<sup>24</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. <sup>25</sup> He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. <sup>26</sup> If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.* (John 12:24-26)

When your soul is planted in the Garden of Lord, what fruit shall we expect to spring up in due season?