



**J**ESUS said unto her, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: <sup>26</sup> And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* (John 11:24-26)

I am not sure how old I was when I first learned that I, along with all with whom I was acquainted, would, at some future hour, DIE! But I do remember at the age of four years trying to find a way around that horrible fate. I at first decided on being an ambulance driver because someone had to be around to gather the dead to the funeral home. When my dad explained that ambulance drivers also died, I opted to become a medical doctor for surely, if any were spared death, it must be the doctors who cared for the sick and dying. But my hopes were dashed yet again when my dad explained that death came to all alike regardless their station in life. But he also explained to my young soul the permanent state of death would be avoided by all who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Of course, I could not fully grasp the depth of that concept at that early age, but I accepted my father's explanation for I considered him to know everything that was worth knowing.

One of my favorite stories of death as a teenager was a fable entitled **The Appointment in Samarra** by W. Somerset Maugham (1933). The story was retold by Boris Karloff who had the voice and tenor of relating the story in such a sophisticated manner as to make it sound real. The speaker in this tale is Death herself:

*There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture, now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not*

*find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the marketplace and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.*

There is some measure of truth in this little fable in that God has an appointment for us with the Angel of Death at some point in our future days. There will be no bargaining, escape, or delay when that moment comes. But then our minds should turn to the text at the heading of this story, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* This is the first principle of a profound truth that Jesus related to Martha outside the tomb of Lazarus that fateful day. Of course, paramount in the understanding of the full measure of that truth is the beginning of it. In Christ, there is no death for He is the Resurrection and the Life. But there is a condition associated with that assurance: . . . *he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* What is the qualifying point of this statement? Our eternal life is based on faith in Christ granted by His grace while we yet lived. The second point is merely a rephrasing of the first: *And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?* Our eternal lives are predicated upon our election in Christ while we yet live, for after death, there is no reckoning in eternity.

We are reminded of that first death that occurred on earth in the Garden at Eden. It was not the man or woman who sinned (Adam or Eve), and it was not the Serpent of the hideous Tree, but it was a completely innocent and beautiful creature God made lovingly to be a companion to the man He had made. Of course, approaching death did, indeed, come upon Adam at his Fall, but it was not the immediate death that the animal suffered at the hand of God. *Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.* (Gen 3:21) It is a hard and unreasonable concept to be comprehended by the human mind, that the innocent must die to cover the sins (nakedness) of the guilty pair. If it offends our sensibilities to even consider that event, just imagine how the Father felt in feeling the need to take the life of one of His precious and innocent creatures to cover Adam's nakedness. The death of that innocent animal, perhaps a lamb, represented the death of His innocent Son who whose life would be given some 4,000 years hence in order to cover the sin of a multitude of sinners.

Physical death to many is a terror. It represents a double death for it is both physical and spiritual to those who have not made their election sure in Christ. I have never known a dying man or woman to bemoan their failure to sin enough, while living, at their last gasp of breath. Their greatest regret is most often the good that they have failed to do in life, and their spiritual state that looms large before their naked souls – too late to benefit man or beast.

There is no good work we can do to inherit eternal life. It is all a Sovereign act of God through Grace which imparts faith and righteous living. Though our righteousness is as 'filthy rags', we are accounted righteous in the eyes of God owing to the imputed righteousness granted through Christ to His elect. *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away* Isaiah 64:6 (KJV) We have not even the merit to draw near by faith without the calling and election of God by means of the Holy Ghost drawing us as a strong magnet to the ship's sanctuary. The dead know nothing at all. *For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward;*

*for the memory of them is forgotten. (Eccl 9:5) If the dead know nothing, how can they, on their own labors and merit draw near to Christ? A dead man has dead ears, dead eyes, a dead heart, and a dead mind. These will not respond to the Gospel. They are DEAD. We all were DEAD ere the Holy Ghost, called out our name and drew us to the bosom of the Father!*

**A***ND you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph 2:1-9)*

Those who are privileged to be called and chosen were also dead before that calling. Lazarus lay dead in a cavernous tomb. He could hear, see, and feel nothing. But when our Lord called his name, he immediately arose and came from the tomb trailing his graves clothes. So do we come forth at the call of the Holy Ghost. But just as Lazarus was a friend of our Lord before his physical death, so must we be His friends before our physical death in responding to our name being called from out the sleep of death of all sinners.

What a blessed assurance we have in knowing that our salvation is assured, and that none whom the Father has given the Son shall be lost. It is not because of who we are, but in whom we have found solace. Just as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalms exclaims, death is only a shadow; and a shadow has no substance whatsoever. It has no power at all – it is simply the absence of light cause by some body passing before the Light Source. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the SHADOW OF DEATH, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (Psalms 23:4)*

For each of my readers that know Christ as Lord and Savior, rejoice in that happy knowledge. Your salvation has been sealed by a boundless and divine love, and love never fails and never dies. Just as in the case of Lazarus of Bethany to whose death Christ referred to as a sleep, so is the death of the saint merely a sleep:

**B***EHOLD, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 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. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 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. 55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:51-57)*