

Issue 54
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from death to life

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life · death · resurrection · eternal destinies · bible teaching

Welcome to Issue 54.

On page 1 is an extract from the introductory chapter of *Life, Death and Destiny* by Warren Prestidge. *Snips and Snails* explores what the Bible says of what substance boys and girls are made. Jefferson Vann discusses the contrast between Luke 8 and Luke 16 to show that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is not the definitive teaching on the intermediate state. The first part of ***Life is...***

“Summing up what God has to say about life is not going to be easy. It is a complex thing, and it cannot be put in a nutshell or on a bumper sticker. But, if one is willing to listen, he will find that the Bible does teach about life. He must be very careful, however, not to assume he knows what is there.”

And Issue 54 concludes with *A Brief Exposition of John 11:25-25*; the words Jesus said to Martha after the death of her brother

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

God’s Richest Blessings to you all.

Tarnya Burge Wessels

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Soul-immortalism

An extract from *Life Death and Destiny*

By Warren Prestidge

(This is extract from the introduction of Life Death and Destiny. See the end of the article for details on how to purchase the book)

Soul-immortalism entered Christianity, not from the Bible, but from ancient Greek philosophy, profoundly influenced by Plato (c.428 – c.348 B.C.). Alan Richardson, former Dean of York, acknowledges this:

...the ancient Church inherited from Greek thought the notion of a soul substance which was by nature immortal, and this conception was often entwined with biblical teaching about resurrection. In the biblical view, a man dies and literally ceases to exist: his resurrection...was the result of an act of new creation by God.¹

We owe Plato the greatest respect as a genuine and profound seeker after truth, but he would certainly not have wanted us to accept any of his conclusions uncritically.² Yet this is what Christian tradition has done.



As for the question of the nature of final punishment, the eminent British philosopher Bertrand Russell has correctly observed:

It is sometimes supposed that Hell was a Christian invention, but this is a mistake. What Christianity did in this respect was only to systematise earlier popular beliefs.³

Today, more and more Bible scholars are finding the case against eternal torment convincing, or at least are calling for “fresh, radical and unbridled examination of the biblical data”.⁴

As far back as 1931, Archbishop William Temple called for such a re-examination. First, as to the Christian view of death, Temple asserted, in his Drew Lecture on Immortality:

The core of the doctrine (of the future life) is this: Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal, if he will receive it from God and on God’s terms... It is a doctrine, not of Immortality, but of Resurrection... There is a very strong case for thinking out the whole subject

*again, in as complete independence as possible alike of medieval and of protestant traditions.*⁵

Second, as to hell, Temple claimed, during another series of lectures to the University Church at Oxford (*Christian Faith and Life*, p.81):

*If men had not imported the Greek and unbiblical notion of the natural indestructibility of the individual soul, and then read the New Testament with that already in their minds, they would have drawn from it a belief, not in everlasting torment, but in annihilation.*⁶

I am a convinced Christian and a church pastor. It is not my purpose to detract in any way from Christian faith, nor to stigmatise the Christian Church. My purpose is to explore and explain what the Bible actually teaches on these matters, in order to advocate a truly biblical faith for today. The Bible is the one authority all Christians recognise and yet I am convinced that there is an urgent need for Christians today to recover and reclaim a truly biblical understanding of the human person, death and God's ultimate purpose. I am also convinced that many people who reject or ignore Christian faith today have never been shown what the Bible itself actually teaches. Surely it is a matter of truly vital concern for everyone, Christian or

not, to find reality regarding life, death and destiny.

So this book {Life, Death and Destiny} will set out systematically and straightforwardly what the Bible teaches about human death, eternal life and the final state of those whom God rejects. I am well aware that much may seem novel or even controversial, especially to readers nurtured on traditional doctrines of soul-immortalism and hell. However the views I shall be arguing for are not new, but have always been held by some and are held today by an increasing number.

I am after truth, not originality. Furthermore, the book would become much larger, more expensive and less readable, if I were to enter into a detailed discussion of every point of biblical interpretation! So, to make it clear that the explanations of biblical passages which I advance are not simply eccentricities of my own, and to help keep discussion within manageable limits, I shall quote frequently from internationally established scholars in the field.⁹ However, I trust that in the end the Bible will speak clearly for itself.

This book argues the following. *First*, there is no immortal human soul or spirit. Rather, we all both live and die as whole body-and-soul beings. Our one and only hope of immortality is to be raised bodily from the dead, reconstituted as whole beings, at the coming of God's final Kingdom, through Jesus Christ. *Second*, there will indeed be those whom God rejects at His final judgment and excludes from His Kingdom. However, they will not suffer forever, either physically or psychologically or spiritually, but will be finally and literally destroyed. In this book, the term "conditional immortality" will be used, as it quite often is, to refer to these two points. The entire matter is summed up in one memorable saying of the Apostle Paul, Romans 6:23:

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*



References

¹ "Soul", in A. Richardson (Ed), *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1976, p.316.

² *Plato's hero was Socrates, who questioned everything!*

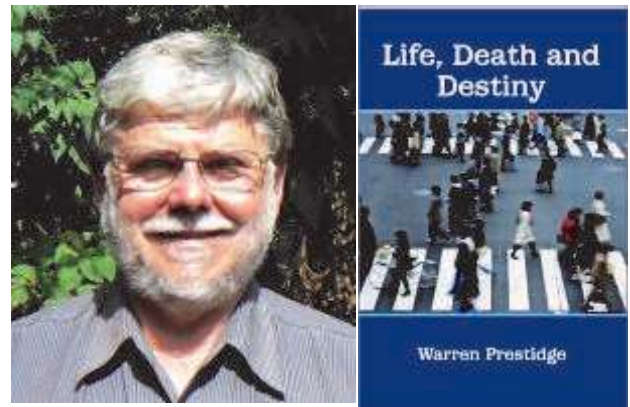
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⁵ *Recalled in Eric Lewis, Christ, The First Fruits*, Boston: Warren Press, 1949, pp15-16.

⁶ *Lewis, Christ, The First Fruits*, pp. 15-16.

⁷ *Not that all authors quoted in support of particular points would fully agree on everything in this book, of course!*



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Life, Death and Destiny 2nd Edition by Warren Prestidge is now available:

- New Zealand readers you may purchase a copy from [Fishpond](#)
- International Readers from from [Amazon](#)
- E-book Edition from [lulu.com](#)

Snips and snails

by Jefferson Vann

The nursery rhyme asks “What are little boys made of?” — and answers “*Snips & snails & puppy dogs tails and such are little boys made of.*”¹ Little girls fare slightly better. They are made of “*sugar and spice and everything nice.*” No one believes that these statements reflect the actual chemical makeup of boys and girls. But anyone who watches these little darlings play can understand what the original author was getting at.

formed from the dust

The Bible gives us a much more scientifically accurate description of what little boys and girls are made of — and their parents too. Moses,

describing the creation of Adam, says that God formed him “from the dust of the ground”² or “of dust from the ground.”³ Our bodies are composed of the same elements found elsewhere in nature. Paul tells us that our ancestor Adam was “a man of dust”⁴ and we share his nature.

returning to the dust

After sin entered this world, human beings were punished for their rebellion by the LORD commanding a reversal of the creation process — which is called death. This is the pronouncement that God made: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”⁵

The breath of life which animates the dust is taken away, and the sinner returns to dust alone.

This description of death lacks the colour added to it by time and tradition. There are no halos, no pearly gates, no bright light. Death is simply losing life. It is lying down in the dust.⁶ It is going down to the dust.⁷ It is dwelling in the dust.⁸ It is sleeping in the dust.⁹ It is returning



to the dust.¹⁰ It is being laid in the dust of death.¹¹

Faithful men of God prayed to be protected from this fate. They did not imagine that death would give them an opportunity to worship. They prayed "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?"¹² The answer was "no." Worship is something that living people do.

I am but dust

When Abraham dared to address the angel of the LORD, appealing for him to save the righteous in Sodom, he understood what he was made of. He said "*Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.*"¹³ The LORD was the one with the immortal Spirit, not Abraham. Humans may devise all kinds of philosophical speculations about being imperishable and immortal, but the LORD "*knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*"¹⁴

dust as a sign of mourning

From ancient times, putting dust on one's head was a sign of great shame, humility and mourning.¹⁵ It was a reminder that we are mor-

tal, made of the dust of the earth, and not like our creator. Leaders were reminded that God had exalted them "out of the dust"¹⁶ and if they became unfaithful, he could humble them. Apart from his grace they are nothing.

Jesus standing on the dust

The good news of the resurrection is described in the Bible using the same term that details what we are made of. Job proclaims "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*"¹⁷ But that word "earth" is not the word used in Genesis 1:1.¹⁸ It is the same word translated dust in Genesis 2:7.¹⁹ The dust that the Messiah will stand on at the last day will be the dust of Job's body. But then something amazing happens. Job continues "*Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes shall see and not another.*"²⁰ The Messiah stands over the dust of Job's dead body and brings it back to life!

This is the hope that the Bible gives humanity. It is not survival after death but rescue from death. It is not being "*found naked*" (without a body) in the intermediate state but being "*further*

clothed" with a resurrection body.²¹ The Bible says that when Jesus Christ returns "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and *we shall be changed.*"²² The nature of that change is made clear as well: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."²³ We are dust: that is what we are made of, but our destiny is to be more ■



Jefferson Vann, missionary with Advent Christian General Conference, and elder at McAlpin Advent Christian Church in Florida. He is pictured below with one of his grandsons Jeffrey. You can find more of writings on www.afterlife.co.nz

References

- ¹from an original poem by Robert Southey (1774-1843).
- ²Genesis 2:7 (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NLT, NRSV).
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- ⁴1 Corinthians 15:47-49.
- ⁴Genesis 3:19 (ESV) see also Job 10:9.
- ⁵Job 20:11; 21:26.
- ⁶Psalms 22:29.
- ⁷Isaiah 26:19.
- ⁸Daniel 12:2.
- ⁹Job 34:15; Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes
- ¹⁰3:20.
- ¹¹Psalms 22:16.
- ¹²Psalms 30:9 ESV.
- ¹³Genesis 18:27 ESV.
- ¹⁴Psalms 103:14.
- ¹⁵Joshua 7:6, Job 2:12; Lamentations 2:10; Ezekiel 27:30; Revelation 18:19.
- ¹⁶1 Kings 16:2 (see also Psalm 113:7).
- ¹⁷Job 19:25 ESV.
- ¹⁸Hebrew 'erets
- ¹⁹Hebrew 'afar
- ²⁰Job 19:26-27 NASB.
- ²¹2 Corinthians 5:1-4.
- ²²1 Corinthians 15:52.
- ²³1 Corinthians 15:49.

Rich Man and Lazarus

by Jefferson Vann

(This is an extract from the article [Did you say sleep?](#) Which is published on the [afterlife website](#))

The Rich Man and Lazarus is not definitive teaching on the intermediate state

Conditionalists refuse to accept the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as definitive teaching on the intermediate state for several reasons, some of which can be seen in the contrast between these texts:

1. Luke 8 reflects a literal event in the life of Jesus and a real human being, a small girl. Luke 16 reflects a story that Jesus told, which probably did not originate with him. He used one of the Pharisees' stories, and ended it with a twist that they did not expect.
2. The focus of Luke 8 was a real death and a real resurrection. The focus of Luke 16 was the selfishness of the Pharisees and their refusal to follow the law by having compassion on the needy. In which passage would it be more natural for Jesus to

convey didactic teaching about the intermediate state?

3. The witnesses of the event described in Luke 8 were Jesus himself, the young girl and her parents, and some of his disciples. The hearers of the story in Luke 16 were the Pharisees, who "were lovers of money" and "ridiculed him" because he taught that "you cannot serve God and money." ((Luke 16:13-14)) In which context would it have been more appropriate for Jesus to share insight about the mystery of the intermediate state?
4. The literary context of each passage is also important to consider. Luke 8 appears in a conjunction with a group of passages which emphasize who Jesus is. His authority and power are expressed in the chapters immediately preceding and following the story in chapter 8. In that context, it makes sense to show Jesus as having power to raise the dead.

Luke 16 is within a group of chapters emphasizing the opposition and antagonism of those (like the Pharisees) who wanted to see Jesus done away with. In that context, what Luke wants to show is the reason why these people hated Jesus, and why his journey to Jerusalem would lead to the cross. A literal description of the intermediate state would not add to Luke's purpose for Luke 16.

5. In the final analysis, it must be admitted that these two texts do represent two alternative views of the intermediate state. In the one, people are asleep, and must be awakened by resurrection. In the other, people are awake, and are experiencing some sort of after-life. In Luke 8, there is no reference to judgment. In Luke 16, all those who have died are already being judged.
6. One cannot combine these two views of the intermediate state without distorting one into insignificance. Conditionalists accept the teaching of Luke 8 as normative, and choose to see the description in Luke 16 as representing what the Phari-

sees believed — not what Jesus believed — about the intermediate state. ■



Lazarus and Dives, illumination from the Codex Aureus of Echternach

Top panel: Lazarus at the rich man's door

Middle panel: Lazarus' soul is carried to Paradise by two angels; Lazarus in Abraham's bosom

Bottom panel: Dives' soul is carried off by two devils to Hell; Dives is tortured in Hades

From

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades_in_Christianity

Life is ... (Part one)

By Jefferson Vann

If you are ever inclined to be philosophical, try an internet search for quotes that begin with the words "life is..." Some of my favourites are listed below:

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." ? John Lennon

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving." ? Albert Einstein

"Life's hard. It's even harder when you're stupid." ? John Wayne

"Life is to be enjoyed, not endured" ? Gordon B. Hinckley

"Life's under no obligation to give us what we expect." ? Margaret Mitchell

"Life is too short, or too long, for me to allow myself the luxury of living it so badly." ? Paulo Coelho

"Life is a daring adventure or nothing at all." ? Helen Keller

"The whole of life is just like watching a film. Only it's as though you always get in ten minutes after the big picture has started, and no-

one will tell you the plot, so you have to work it out all yourself from the clues." ? Terry Pratchett, Moving Pictures

"Life is a long lesson in humility." ? J.M. Barrie, The Little Minister

"Life is like an onion; you peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep." ? Carl Sandburg

"Life ... is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." ? William Shakespeare, Macbeth



...And then there's my favorite "life is..." quote of all, attributed to Forrest Gump's mother:

"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get."

It seems that almost everybody has an idea or two about life, but we all do not agree. Even if we were unified, who's to say that we would be right? What we need is advice from the One who invented life. We can find such advice, but we have to look in the right place – the Bible.

Summing up what God has to say about life is not going to be easy. It is a complex thing, and it cannot be put in a nutshell or on a bumper sticker. But, if one is willing to listen, he will find that the Bible does teach about life. He must be very careful, however, not to assume he knows what is there.

the bad news

The most prevalent message throughout the whole Bible about life is that it is limited. It is a precious thing because it runs out. Life has a beginning and an end, and the end always comes too soon. A series of images are placed before the Bible reader that emphasizes this limited nature of life.

life is a shadow

One of Job's "friends" warned him of the limited nature of life by saying "our days on earth are a



shadow.”¹ He did not mean that life is an illusion. He meant that our days pass by quickly, disappearing as soon as the light hits them. Job, himself, used the same imagery when he said “Man who is born of a woman ...flees like a shadow and continues not.”² You cannot look at a shadow, and come back in an hour or two and find it in the same place. Like life, shadows are always coming and going. Shadows do not stay put.

David expressed the same thought when he prayed “For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a

shadow, and there is no abiding.”³ David combined the shadow imagery with two words that identify a temporary resident in the land. The Israelites were temporary residents in Egypt. But, even after they left Egypt and took up residence in Canaan, they found that they were strangers and sojourners there. This life is much too short to be thought of as permanent.

In his poetry, David reflects on this fact as well. He refuses to fear man, because *“his days are like a passing shadow.”*⁴ He puts his trust in the One who is permanent, and relies on the LORD for rescue.

David’s son, Solomon reflected on this reality as well. He challenges his readers to consider their vain lives which will pass *“like a shadow.”*⁵ He taught that people should not put their hopes in their plans for the future, because no one knows what will happen to those plans. What matters is not tomorrow, because tomorrow is not guaranteed us. What matters is today, fearing God, and keeping his commandments today.⁶

Another Old Testament saint, identified merely as “one afflicted” writes “I eat ashes like bread and mingle

tears with my drink, because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down. My days are like an evening shadow.”⁷ These are the words of someone who has suffered much, and does not always know why. Life just happens, and only God knows why it happens the way it does. Lots of things just seem unfair, particularly the more we realize that the limits of life do not allow for do-overs. Often we realize too late that our days are like an evening shadow, soon to be over – swallowed up in death, and nothing we can do will change that fact.

But it is not just the Old Testament that portrays life in this gloomy fashion. James instructs rich believers that they will “fade away in the midst of (their) pursuits.” No matter how powerful you are, your life is limited.

life is a mist

Another way the Bible says the same thing is by comparing our lives to a mist or a cloud of vapor. Job laments:

“The eye of him who sees me



will behold me no more; while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up; he returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him anymore.”⁸

Life’s end is compared to a cloud that vanishes before one’s eyes. People disappear like they are getting beamed off by a transporter (my apologies if you have never watched Star Trek). Now you see them, now you don’t.

It is precisely for this reason that James warns his readers not to presume upon their own ability to accomplish what they want to with their lives. He writes:

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year

there and trade and make a profit”

—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”⁹ The point is not that we should never make plans. The point is that we should not presume that we will have the time for all our plans to be accomplished. We are not in charge down here. The sovereign God is. It is his will that matters.

life is a sprint



The Bible presents our lives as a race, but not a long marathon. They are more like a 100 yard dash. Just when we are in our best stride, the finish line appears. Job lamented that his *“days are swifter than a runner; they flee*

away; they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey.”¹⁰ If you have ever watched an bird swoop down to catch a mouse or a fish, you get the idea. All the drama is over in seconds. Life is a chase, and whether you are a victim or a victor, the chase is over quickly.

Job rightly concluded that *“Man who is born of a woman is few*



*of days and full of trouble.”*¹¹ As Ethan the Ezrahite prayed, he asked the LORD to remember how short his time is.¹² The Proverbs instructs us *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”*¹³ We never know how long we have. Our days are few. The older we get, the more we get the proper perspective on age. When we are young, we all think we are immortal. We assume we will have enough time to do everything we will want to

do. Before we know it, we are looking back on a life spent, rather than forward on dreams and wishes. We never seem to have enough time. That is probably how Jacob felt, when he told Pharaoh that his days were *“few and evil.”*¹⁴ He was 130 years old at the time!

So the Bible warns us that life is a sprint. It may bring great joy or sorrow, great accomplishment or failure, but it will be over too soon. When it is over, it is over. We *“are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.”*¹⁵ Such are the limits of this life we are born into.

inhale – exhale

Another image the Bible uses to describe human life is the breath. Breathe in, breathe out, that’s it. David proclaims *“surely all mankind is a mere breath!”*¹⁵ Asaph lamented that God’s people are *“a wind that passes and comes not again.”*¹⁶ Moses said that *“we bring our years to an end like a sigh.”*¹⁷ The very process that identifies us as being alive is also a metaphor for our lives. We will all

be dead much longer than we were alive (at least this life). That is all the more reason to make this life – that short time between inhaling and exhaling – matter.

don't bring flowers

I have an unusual request for those of you who might attend my funeral. Please do not bring flowers. I know ... flowers are supposed to show love and respect. They are something pretty you can put near a casket. They smell nice. But memorial services



often take days, and then the flowers are put graveside. And what do they do? They rot. Just like all vegetation, plucked from the soil, they immediately begin to decay. Often even during the funeral

service you can smell the flowers turning stale. People have to put up with a lot at funerals. They have to say goodbye to their loved ones. They have to come to terms with their loss. They have to pay their final respects. Is it asking too much for my friends to not have to do that in the midst of decaying vegetation?

The Bible uses the reality of rotting grass and flowers as a symbol for the brevity of life as well. Job says that man *“comes out like a flower and withers.”*¹⁹ He may start off looking good, but that does not last long. Almost everyone looks good in their baby pictures. The older you get, the more you start asking where that beautiful baby went. Mirrors are not very kind. They remind us that the flower that we were when we came out has begun to wither.

Moses compared a human life to grass, because *“in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.”*²⁰ Psalm 102 is described as *“A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”* One of his complaints is *“I wither away like*

grass."²¹ At some point in your life, you are going to recognize that you are not living, you are dying. Things are getting softer, grayer, more wrinkly. Your body has stopped growing and progressing. It is now digressing.

Isaiah used this reality to show the difference between all creation and its creator:

***"All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the
flower of the field.
The grass withers,
the flower fades when the
breath of the LORD blows on it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers,
the flower fades,
but the word of our God will
stand forever."***²²

The apostle Peter quoted this text as well. He took the same context (the permanence of God compared our impermanence) and applied it to the born-again believer. He taught that *"you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."*²³ *our resurrected life will be permanent.*

This is great news, because it

speaks of God's promise that our resurrected life will be permanent. But it is also a reminder that our present life is not permanent. We were not born immortal and imperishable. We were born into this world as a flower, destined to decay and die. If it were not for God's grace in promising believers another life – a resurrection, our only destiny would be death.

Other images in the Bible remind us of humanity's present inclination toward decay. Job reminds us that *"Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten."*²⁴ Isaiah encourages his readers to put their trust in God, not to fear man, because *"I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass," "For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations."*²⁵

This reality of a decaying world is not evil in itself. It is a reminder of the evil present in this world,

and the Bible explains why this world is not permanent. God has an eternity in store for his beloved, and its beauty will never fade. It encourages us not to put our hopes and aspirations and trust in the things that are (presently) seen. We should *“look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*²⁶

dust to dust

God created humanity from the dust of the earth, and his word continues to remind us that dust is the destiny of that creation. Even the great Abraham, father of the faithful, referred to himself as *“but dust and ashes.”*²⁷ He held no delusions of a nature that made him incapable of decay and death.

David agreed. He spoke of the rich and prosperous, and reminded his readers that they too would become dust. He taught *“All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.”*²⁸ And this text clarifies that such language does not merely reflect the fate of the body. It

is the soul – the whole life – that the rich cannot keep alive. Death is the undoing of creation, which was a combination of dust and life. For *“the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”*²⁹ Death reverses the process. The breath of life returns to God, but the soul dies.

David combines a number of these images of human destiny in one of his psalms:

***“For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are
dust.
As for man, his days are like
grass;
he flourishes like a flower of
the field;
for the wind passes over it,
and it is gone,
and its place knows it no
more.”***³⁰

The consistent picture in the Bible is that humanity does not have what it takes to live forever. That is why we need God’s deliverance from this destiny of dust. Another psalmist puts it this way:

***“I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
When his breath departs he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.
Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God.”³¹***

So, my friend, that is the bad news. We are destined for decay and death, and no human being can ever change that. But the Bible does not leave us there. The good news of the gospel is also consistently taught in the Bible. It has already been hinted at in those texts that encourage us to put our hope in the LORD. He is the answer to the question posed by all these graves. ■

(continued in Issue 55)

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- ⁸ Job 7:8-10
⁹ James 4:13-14
¹⁰ Job 9:25-26
¹¹ Job 14:1
¹² Psalm 89:47
¹³ Proverbs 27:1
¹⁴ Genesis 47:9
¹⁵ 2 Samuel 14:14
¹⁶ Psalm 39:11; 144:4
¹⁷ Psalm 78:39
¹⁸ Psalm 90:9
¹⁹ Job 14:2.
²⁰ Psalm 90:6
²¹ Psalm 102:1,11
²² Isaiah 40:6-8.
²³ 1 Peter 1:23
²⁴ Job 13:28
²⁵ Isaiah 51:12, 8
²⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:18
²⁷ Genesis 18:27
²⁸ Psalm 22:29 KJV
²⁹ Genesis 2:7
³⁰ Psalm 103:14-16
³¹ Psalm 146:2-5

A Brief Exposition of John 11:25-26

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By M. W. STRANG.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"



The meaning of these gracious words of our Lord and Saviour has of-

ten been the subject of devout inquiry and friendly difference of opinion among believers in the doctrine of Life in Christ. Not that their general scope is difficult to understand. They plainly teach that a triumph over death and the grave is promised to all who believe in Him. And the "life" and "death" spoken of are no figures of speech. These words, as used by our Lord in His comforting assurance to Martha, are to be understood in no secondary or "spiritual" sense. They refer to that literal death with which we are all so painfully familiar, which robs us of our dearest friends, and whose reversal the Lord of Life alone can accomplish. Any difficulty in our grasping the full sense of His words is found rather in adjusting the second half of the saying quoted to the meaning of the first half. The words of the first portion hardly need explanation. "*He that*

believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live." They tell us that the believer in Christ is liable to death, but will live again by resurrection from the dead, even should he die. But when our Lord adds: "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die,*" what is the precise meaning of His words?

Some have suggested that the closing words should be translated "*shall not die for ever.*" They can certainly be so rendered. But if this translation is intended to mean anything different from "*shall never die,*" it can only be by repeating in another way the promise of the first clause. That is to say, the first clause means that death, to the believer, only lasts till broken by resurrection; and the second clause would say the same thing: his death will not last for ever. But I cannot think our Lord was only repeating the same idea, while seeming to announce a fresh one.

Others have found in these words of our Lord a statement of the destinies of the sleeping saints and those "*who are alive and remain*" at His coming, as more plainly announced by His apostle afterwards. The former shall be raised ("*though they die, yet shall they live*") ; the latter shall be changed without dy-

ing (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52; 1 Thess 4:15 -17). There is no doubt our Lord's words might be read as an announcement of this distinction between the two classes. But is it likely that He would be so understood by Martha? His purpose no doubt was to give simple and direct comfort to His weeping disciple and friend; not to anticipate the mysteries or secrets afterwards to be disclosed by His apostles. And so when He asks Martha, "*Believest thou this?*" something surely was meant which she could easily grasp and believe, especially at such a time. This consideration leads me to set aside the explanation of His words just referred to as somewhat far-fetched and unlikely.

In my opinion, the clue to the second clause is to be found in the proper idea which we attach to the word "live" in the first clause. It is there equivalent to "live again;" as in many other passages; e.g., Mark 16: 11; Acts 25:19; Rom 6: 10; 14:9. In this last passage the word is actually rendered "revived." Now, let us read it so in the passage under consideration, and carry it forward in

the same sense to the second clause. Then we shall have: "*He that believeth in Me, though he should die, yet shall he live again: and everyone that (so) lives again, and believes in Me, shall never die.*" So read, the second clause is a declaration that the believers' resurrection, spoken of in the first clause, is to be a resurrection to die

no more. The whole saying, so understood, is a simple two-fold assurance of the blessed destiny ultimately awaiting all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and as such it would be easily assented to, and greatly valued, by the mourning Martha. ■



Christ with Martha and Maria Henryk Siemiradzki (1843–1902)

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Statement of Faith

1. We believe in God and His one and only Son, Jesus the Christ. Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; 3:16; 20:31; Mat. 16:16.
2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psalms 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psalm 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev. 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psalm 145:20; Mat. 10:28 Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.