



*Death and  
Bereavement*



Problems Christians Face

# **Death and Bereavement**

**by**

**Gordon Hughes**

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by Gordon Hughes

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## Chapter 1

### Why Death?

It is perhaps stating the obvious to remark that in our world today death is very much a part of life. That may be through personal involvement with the loss of close family or friends or the much larger loss of life around the world of which the media daily remind us. We need, then, to ask the question why death is such an integral part of life. Is it merely part of an evolutionary process which results in the survival of the fittest? It is important that our views on this matter, as indeed on any other matter, be formed by a biblical view rather than current political correctness. In this chapter, then, we shall look at what the Bible teaches about the place of death in this world.

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First of all, it should be emphasised that in the beginning death was not part of the Creator's intention for His creation. Genesis 1:31 tells us that at the completion of creation, **“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”** Adam and Eve were part of that original creation and were placed by God in the Garden of Eden **“to tend and keep it”** (Genesis 2:15). At that time, God gave Adam the commandment,

**“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:16,17).

Genesis chapter 3 tells us the sad story of the failure of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the entrance of death into God's once perfect creation. Take time to read this important chapter.

We are not told how long Adam and Eve enjoyed that garden in their state of innocence. During that time, it would seem that it was God's custom to come **"in the garden in the cool of the day"** (v.8) to enjoy fellowship with Adam and Eve. It is unlikely that Satan, the arch-enemy both of God and man, would allow this blissful state of affairs to continue for too long. He tempts Eve with the suggestion,

***"You will not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate"*** (vv.4-6).

Did Adam and Eve immediately fall down dead? No! ***"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden"*** (v.8).

Had God failed to keep His word then? Certainly not! Balaam rightly declares, ***"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He not spoken, and will He not make it good?"*** (Numbers 23:19). And Paul reminds Titus, ***"God, who cannot lie"*** (Titus 1:2). God's solemn promise to Adam, as we have seen, was, ***"In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"***. That day in Eden, Adam and Eve both died! True, they tried to hide from God but they were already spiritually dead.

*That  
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and Eve  
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The communion which Adam and Eve had enjoyed with God in the cool of the day was now broken. Separation from God was the result of their sin. That separation was further emphasised by the fact that

***“the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (vv.23, 24).***

Sadly, there was absolutely no way back!

The Bible describes God as a Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet at the same time one God. The *Triune* God is sometimes used to describe God. That essential unity in the Godhead is evident in the opening chapter of the Bible: ***“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”*** (Genesis 1:26). The entire Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, acted together in the work of creation, the Son being the divine agent through whom the work was carried out (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

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work of creation,*

Similarly man, made in the likeness of God, exists as a tripartite being – body, soul and spirit. In his body, man makes contact with the world around him; in his soul he makes contact with himself; and in his spirit he makes contact with his God. So we read,

***“And 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 being”*** (Genesis 2:7).

We have seen that God's promise, **"...in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"** was fully maintained in the spiritual death of Adam and Eve and the separation from God which took place immediately. The death of the body would take place later in God's good time. So we read, **"All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died"** (Genesis 5:5). Though his body was dead, his never dying soul and spirit, given by God, would never die! The Lord Jesus reminds us of this in the parable of the beggar, Lazarus, and the rich man:

**"So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom"** (Luke 16:22,23).

There is existence after the physical death of the body!

Consequent upon the death of the body, the soul and spirit of those who died prior to Calvary went to Sheol. 'Sheol' is the Hebrew translation of the Greek word 'Hades', the place of departed spirits. So David, after a particularly trying time when he thought he might die, wrote, **"For great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol"** (Psalm 68:13). It is clear from Jesus' parable that in Sheol there is both blessing and judgment. Blessing for those in Old Testament times, before Jesus' redemptive work at Calvary was on the same principle as for the Christian believer today, that is, faith. So we read of Abraham, **"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6; see also Romans 4:3,9-22). For the Christian believer today, on physical death, the soul and spirit are immediately in the presence of Christ. So we read, **"absent from the body...present with the Lord"** (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Let us take to heart this solemn lesson from the Garden of Eden



– sin separates! We see this in society today: broken marriages as a result of the unfaithfulness of one partner; criminals incarcerated in prison and so separated from society because of their wrongdoing; broken friendships because of hasty and unwarranted words. The list could go on and all of these bring their own sadness and heartache but the saddest and most serious separation is separation from God! So Isaiah has to tell

*– sin separates!*

*... the saddest  
and most serious  
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separation from  
God!*

the nation of Israel, **“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you”** (Isaiah 59:2). That spiritual separation would ultimately lead to Israel being taken captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:14-21) and so separated from the land of Canaan that God had originally given to them.

It is significant that the Apostle Paul in his epistle dealing with the Gospel, the good news of God’s salvation, having arrived at the solemn conclusion, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Roman 3:23), later goes on to deal with Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. Paul writes,

**“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”** (Romans 5:12).

But amidst the sadness of what happened in the Garden of Eden there is a note of hope! Adam and Eve, having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, knew that they were naked and attempted to cover up their nakedness. We read, **“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings”** (Genesis 3:7).

*But  
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Fig leaves would have been of little permanent use as they were sent out of Eden to toil over a sin cursed

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earth with its thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17,18). But God, in His grace, was still ready to help Adam and Eve. We read, ***“Also for Adam and his wife, the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them”*** (Genesis 3:21). But those tunics of skin would first have required the sacrifice of animals to provide the skin. So the curse of death fell not only on Adam and Eve but on the animal creation also.

We need to appreciate how wide ranging are the consequences of the entry of sin into the world. As we have seen, the fellowship which Adam and Eve had once enjoyed with God was broken. They were excluded from the garden of Eden with no possibility of return: ***“So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life”*** (Genesis 3:24). Physical death would follow later.

There were consequences for the plant kingdom. God’s word to Adam was, ***“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you ...in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground”*** (Genesis 3:17-19). So gardeners today still toil and sweat over weeds and other unwanted vegetation!

There were consequences also for the animal creation. Satan presented himself to Eve in the form of a serpent, probably then a most beautiful and attractive creature so as to attract Eve’s attention. God’s judgment upon the serpent in the Garden of Eden was,

***“Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle,***

***and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”*** (Genesis 3:14,15).

So today amongst all of creation there is probably no creature which attracts our loathing more than the serpent. Yet God’s condemnation of the serpent carries within it that hope of Satan’s ultimate destruction. The virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ ensures that He alone can properly be described as ***“the seed of the woman”***. Joseph the carpenter had no part in His birth!

Finally, even inanimate creation seems to have come under that curse for the Apostle Paul would remind the Christians at Rome that there is coming a day in which ***“the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know”,*** he writes, ***“that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now”*** (Romans 8:21,22). One small act of disobedience on the part of Adam and Eve - yet with such calamitous consequences!

*One small act of disobedience on the part of Adam and Eve - yet with such calamitous consequences!*

Yet even amongst all the sadness of what took place in the Garden of Eden, there is a strong note of hope for us. God’s act of grace in providing tunics of skin for Adam and Eve, with the shedding of blood which that provision would have entailed, is a sure pointer, even in those early days, to the coming sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. But that must be our subject in chapter 2!

# Death and Bereavement

## EXAM 1-Why Death?

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. The sin of Adam and Eve was
  - a. disobedience
  - b. jealousy
  - c. pride
2. Death is
  - a. oblivion
  - b. the separation of the soul and spirit from the body
  - c. annihilation
3. God provided Adam and Eve with
  - a. coats of skin
  - b. coats of fig leaves
  - c. nothing, because they deserved nothing
4. What is God not able to do?
  - a. Forgive
  - b. Lie
  - C. Hate
5. At what time of day did God come down in the Garden of Eden to speak with Adam and Eve?
  - a. In the morning
  - b. At midday
  - C. In the cool of the evening

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. Adam and Eve ate an apple from the forbidden tree.
7. Sin separates man from God.
8. Thistles were part of God's original creation.
9. Adam's physical death occurred when he was 930.
10. God's promised Deliverer will bruise Satan's heel.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

"Man's inhumanity to man." This statement of the poet, Robert Burns, is a sad comment on the damage brought about by sin in the world today. Think of some instances that would illustrate this.

## Chapter 2

### Christ's Victory over Death

Chapter 1 ended on a note of sadness – sin had come into the world and spoiled God's perfect creation; Adam and Eve had lost their privileged position in the Garden of Eden and a flaming sword ensured that there was no way back. But the saddest thing of all was that the fellowship which Adam and Eve had previously enjoyed with God was now broken; sin had separated them from God.

*Adam and Eve had lost their privileged position...*

Did the failure of Adam and Eve take God by surprise? Did God now wonder what to do? Absolutely not! Peter, writing to Jewish Christians who had been forced by persecution to leave their homeland, tells them,

***“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God”*** (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Adam and Eve, of their own free will, had chosen to listen to Satan and disobey God. God might simply have abandoned them to the judgment that was rightly theirs but instead He already had His rescue plan in place - ***‘foreordained before the***

**foundation of the world’.** The words are mind-boggling, yet they are God’s words and therefore totally true and reliable. God’s plan

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and reliable.*

of redemption was in place even before Adam’s disobedience occasioned the need for it! That should cause us to bow in thanksgiving and worship before such a gracious God!

Those Jewish Christians would be well acquainted with another great deliverance in their national history some 1,300 years earlier. Then the nation had been in bondage in Egypt, slaves to Pharaoh. God had sent Moses as His special messenger to Pharaoh with the demand, **‘Let My people go’** (Exodus 5:1). Pharaoh had steadfastly refused to do this, despite nine horrendous plagues which God had sent upon the land. Finally, God told His people to be ready to leave Egypt as He would send one final plague which would make Pharaoh ready to let them go. The firstborn son in every Egyptian house would be slain. But if a righteous God was to pass through the land in judgment, then His people were guilty sinners just like the Egyptians. What was He to do? Yet again, God has

*Yet  
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His rescue plan in hand.

God tells Moses, **“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself... a lamb for a household... Your lamb shall be without blemish... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and**

***the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”*** (Exodus 12:3-13)

Take time to read these verses and others in Exodus chapter 12, a chapter of great importance in the ways of God’s dealing with sinful man.

God’s insistence that the lamb should be **‘without blemish’** is noteworthy. Each morning between the tenth and the fourteenth day of that month, the firstborn son in each Israelite house would have carefully inspected the lamb which had been set aside. Only a spotless lamb would be sufficient to ensure that son’s deliverance from death. Blemish of any kind would disqualify it as a suitable sacrifice. To preserve the son’s life, the family would have been forced to seek refuge with another family under the shed blood of a perfect lamb.

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That insistence on a perfect sacrifice carried right through in the Tabernacle worship which God later instituted for the Israelites and later also in the Temple worship. Note God’s first words to Moses when the Tabernacle was first erected:

***“If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish... And if his offering is of the flocks – of the sheep or of the goats – as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish... When his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish”*** (Leviticus 1:3,10; 3:1).

Yet even those spotless sacrifices could never take away sins as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us: ***“It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”*** (Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices simply allowed God to pass over the sins of His

people as they reminded Him of, and enabled Him to look forward to the coming of that one final and perfect sacrifice of His beloved Son.

Before He was even born, the Lord Jesus was marked out by God to be the sacrifice which would take away man's sins. While Joseph struggled with the news that his betrothed, Mary, was with child which he knew was not his, ***“an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and you will call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins’”*** (Matthew 1:20,21). Indeed, the name Jesus is a transliteration of the Hebrew name ‘Joshua’, meaning ‘**Jehovah is salvation**’, that is, ‘**Saviour**’.

It is of the utmost importance to insist on the fact that the prime purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world was to be the Saviour. Men may be impressed by the moral worth of His teaching; others may be impressed by His miracles. But neither of these was His prime purpose in coming. Scripture jealously guards the fact that He came to be the Saviour. When He was born in Bethlehem, the angels announced to the shepherds, ***“There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”*** (Luke 2:11). At the beginning of the Lord's three years of public ministry, He was publicly marked out by John the Baptist, ***“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29). The Lord Jesus Himself summed up His life as follows, ***“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”*** (Luke 5:32); ***“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*** (Mark 10:45).

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His perfect life during those three years of public ministry only served to confirm to the world that here indeed was the sinless One, uniquely qualified to be that **“lamb without blemish and without spot”** (1 Peter 1:19) who would indeed take away the sin of the world. It is truly significant that when the religious authorities sought to do away with the Lord Jesus, because there was no evidence against Him which would justify His execution, they had to resort to paying false witnesses to testify against Him. **“But not even then did their testimony agree”** (Mark 14:59)! The Lord Jesus was unjustly condemned and brought to Pilate for execution. Having examined Him, Pilate had to say three times to the crowd, **“I find no fault in this Man”** (Luke 23:4,14,22)!

Two thieves were crucified with the Lord, one on either side of Him. At first, both of them reviled Him (Matthew 27:41-44). But one of them, having listened to the Lord Jesus pleading for God’s forgiveness for the nation and hearing the tender care the Lord had for His mother, Mary, rebuked the other thief. He said, **“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”** Then he said to Jesus, **“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”** And Jesus said to him, **“Assuredly, I say unto you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”** (Luke 23:40-43). Finally, the centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion, when he saw that the Lord Jesus was dead, said, **“Certainly this was a righteous Man!”** (Luke:23:47).

Jewish law required that no one be put to death without the consistent testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6). Indeed, in any legal matter, **“by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established”**. This requirement, then, was amply fulfilled in the declaration as to the perfection of the Lord Jesus first by Pilate, then by the penitent thief, and

finally by the centurion. ***“A threefold cord is not quickly broken”*** (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

On the cross, the Lord Jesus bore God’s judgment against sin that we deserved – ***“who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”*** (1 Peter 2:24). He tasted that separation from God which Adam and Eve first knew as He cried out, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Incidentally, this is the only one of the 7 sayings of the Lord Jesus on the cross which is recorded twice. This surely testifies to the importance of Christ’s work as our sin-bearer.

*The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is God’s answer to the world that a full, final sacrifice for sin has been made.*

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is God’s answer to the world that a full, final sacrifice for sin has been made. So Peter declares on the day of Pentecost, ***“Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands having crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it”*** (Acts 2:23,24).

As the Lord Jesus died, we read, ***“And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”*** (Matthew 27:51). That huge curtain, some thirty feet tall, stood as the reminder that man was separated from God, shut out from the presence of God. Only the High Priest could go through the veil into the holy of holies, and that but once a year with the blood of sacrifice (Hebrews 9:7). No human hand, but only God’s, could have torn that curtain in that way! So the death of Christ proclaims the fact that the way into God’s presence has been opened up through His sacrifice so that all who trust in Him as their Saviour can enter in (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The penitent thief, as he died shortly after the Lord Jesus, is a magnificent testimony to the fact that the way into God's presence was now open. The Lord Jesus had said to him, **"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"** (Luke 23:43). Sadly, the other thief, totally

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unrepentant, did not avail himself of that open way and ended up in a lost eternity. Of the event, Bishop Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool, has written, 'One was saved that all

men might have hope, but only one so that none may presume.'

The resurrection and ascension to heaven of the Lord Jesus strikes another victorious message: **"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus"** (Hebrews 6:19,20). The Lord Jesus has entered heaven as our forerunner. Where He has gone, all those who have trusted Him as Saviour must one day surely follow! What a triumph of God's grace!

This glorious note of victory is also taken up by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the great chapter of resurrection. Take time to read it through carefully. We shall look only at verses 20-23:

**"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."**

The offering of firstfruits was well known to Jewish worshippers. As its name implies, it was offered to God from the very first of

the harvest. There would be more harvest to follow and be enjoyed by the worshipper.

More to follow! What a triumphant note on which to end this chapter on Christ's victory over death. Where He is now, all those who have trusted Him as Saviour must one day follow. The Lord Jesus prayed to His Father just before the cross. This prayer is recorded for us in John 17. This chapter also will repay careful reading. As you read it, you will feel that, like Moses of old, you are on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). After He had prayed for His disciples, whom He describes as given to Him by His Father, the Lord Jesus then prays for all those who would believe on Him through their word. That is where we in this 21<sup>st</sup> century by grace come in. He ends His prayer, ***“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory”*** (John 17:24). That glorious prospect for the Christian must be the theme for our next chapter.

*Where He is now, all those who have trusted Him as Saviour must one day follow.*

## EXAM 2 - Christ's Victory over Death

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. The Lord Jesus was first marked out as God's Lamb
  - a. before the foundation of the world
  - b. at the cross
  - c. when He was born
2. The Passover lamb's age
  - a. had to be more than a year old
  - b. had to be less than a year old
  - c. did not matter
3. Before crucifying the Lord Jesus, Pilate said of Him:
  - a. I like Him
  - b. I find no fault in Him
  - c. He is a good man
4. Before the cross, the Lord Jesus asked His Father that those whom He had given Him would
  - a. follow Him faithfully
  - b. always love Him
  - c. one day be with Him in glory
5. The cry of the Lord Jesus on the cross, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" is found
  - a. in all the Gospels
  - b. only in Luke and John
  - c. only in Matthew and Mark

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God did not know what to do.
7. It was only after God sent 10 plagues on the land of Egypt that Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave.
8. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was the most important part of His mission in the world.
9. The two thieves who were crucified with the Lord Jesus both went to heaven with Him.
10. The veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died.

### WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In her hymn, "Beneath the cross of Jesus", J. Elizabeth Clephane describes that cross as the place "where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet" and as "a ladder up to heaven". Why do you think these are good descriptions?

## Chapter 3

### The Christian's Hope

Proud parents gaze adoringly at their new born child. They might think about what the future holds for him or her. Will he or she grow up to be rich or poor, strong or weak, a success or a failure? What kind of a world will their child grow up in? Will it suffer from climate change, from the ravages of war, from famine? There seem so many uncertainties to life, so few certainties. It has sometimes been remarked that the only certainty is that one day that child will die!

*...the only  
certainty is that  
one day that  
child will die!*

That is not something which those proud parents would welcome hearing just then, but it is a sad fact of life. As we saw in chapter 1, death came into God's perfect world as a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve.

But there is one glorious exception to this sombre fact! This forms the basis of the Christian's hope. It is that there will come a special day in this world's history when Christians

*...there will come a special day in this  
world's history when Christians will  
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heaven to be with the Lord Jesus !*

will be taken, *without dying*, straight to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus ! In this chapter, we will look at the biblical basis for this astounding claim.

In two special cases, believers have already been taken to heaven without dying. Enoch lived early on in this world's

history, some time before 2,000 B.C. Of him we read, ***“Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”*** (Genesis 5:21-24). That would have been in those days just before the birth of Noah when the wickedness of man was so great that God sent the flood in judgment. The truth about Enoch is also recorded for us in Hebrews 11:5: ***“By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found because God had translated him’; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”***

The second character is Elijah. Like Enoch, he lived in difficult and dark days when the hearts of God’s people had been turned to idolatry through the influence of the wicked King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Nevertheless, throughout this dark time he had served as God’s faithful prophet. Following God’s instructions, he had appointed Elisha as his successor. So we read, ***“And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ...Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”*** (2 Kings 2:1,11).

Our starting point for this claim must be the words of the Lord Jesus Himself to His disciples just before the cross : ***“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you***

*Our starting point for this claim must be the words of the Lord Jesus Himself ...*

**may be also”** (John 14:1-3).

We should note first of all that the Lord Jesus makes His promise to come again conditional upon His going away into heaven. There are three separate testimonies to the fact that He had gone away and was now in heaven. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. Of him we read as he was being stoned to death, **“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’...And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’”** (Acts 7:55-60).

Not long after this, Saul of Tarsus was journeying to Damascus intending **“threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”**. We read, **“And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’”** (see Acts 9:1-9).

Finally, around A.D.95, the disciple John was banished to Patmos **“for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”**. We read, **“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day... I saw... One like the Son of Man... And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen’”** (see Revelation 1:9-20).

*I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.*

So we have the testimony of Stephen who saw the Lord Jesus



back in heaven, of Saul who heard Him from heaven, and of John who both heard and saw the Lord Jesus in heaven. **“By the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the matter be established”** (Deuteronomy 19:15). At the same time, we must insist that the words of the Lord Jesus are the words of **“God who cannot lie”** (Titus 1:2) and need no independent confirmation, even though God, in recognition of our human weaknesses, has chosen to give us such confirmation. We need to cling to His promise, **“I will come again and receive you to Myself”!**

*“I will  
come  
again and  
receive  
you to  
Myself”*

But some may ask, ‘Is this promise of the Lord Jesus simply fulfilled when the Christian dies and his or her spirit is received up in heaven - **“absent from the body... present with the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 5:8)? This was not a promise, however, to an individual but to Jesus’ disciples as a body, suggesting that this is to be a collective rather than an individual fulfilment. The picture is made clear by some words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

***“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”.***

Paul had been able to spend only 2-3 weeks in Thessalonica

before persecution forced him to flee to Berea (Acts 17:1-10). Nevertheless his time there had resulted in considerable blessing so that in his first letter to them he was able to write, **“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven”** (1:9,10). In Paul’s short time with them, he had clearly been able to speak to them about the imminent return of the Lord from heaven for His church and of the Lord’s subsequent setting up of His glorious kingdom. That kingdom is dealt with in Paul’s second letter to them. Such was their eager expectation of the Lord’s return that we learn from this letter that some had given up work and were simply waiting for their Lord, spending their time as busybodies. Their eagerness Paul can commend but not their idle living (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12).

*Some of their fellow believers had died. Did this mean that these believers would miss out on the blessing of the Lord's coming?*

But these young believers had a problem. Some of their fellow believers had died. Did this mean that these believers would miss out on the blessing of the Lord’s coming? The verses from 1 Thessalonians 4 were written to dispel their sorrow and, as such, form the basis of our Christian hope. They deserve our careful study.

**Even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.** Far from missing out on any blessing, Paul assures these young believers that the departed will have this special place with Jesus when He comes to set up His kingdom. But how was this to be achieved? The subsequent verses provide the answer.

**We who are alive...will by no means precede those who are asleep.** No precedence will be given to living believers when the Lord returns.

**The Lord Himself will descend from heaven.** An angel might be

given the job of announcing to the shepherds the first coming of the Lord Jesus to earth (Luke 2:9) and angels guarded His empty tomb when He rose from the dead (John 20:12). But to escort His beloved Church to glory was a job so important that it could be entrusted to none other than the Lord Himself!

**With a shout.** Very rarely do we read of the Lord Jesus lifting up His voice while He was on earth. Indeed Isaiah some 600 years before the Lord Jesus came, specifically prophesied: **“He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street”** (Isaiah 42:2). Only occasionally would that principle be laid aside. He would cry out with a loud voice when He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43). That great triumphant cry from the cross, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30; Matthew 27:50) was another loud cry. But *this* is a cry of joy – the joy of the bridegroom when he first sees his bride on their wedding day! **“Jesus... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...”** (Hebrews 12:2).

*...this is a cry of joy  
– the joy of the  
bridegroom when he  
first sees his bride on  
their wedding day!*

**With the voice of an archangel.** An archangel would have authority over many angels. Was this a summons to all those angels, some of whom would have served as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14) and others who had served as guardian angels (Matthew 18:10), now called together to see those whom they had served on earth safely brought to heaven?

*Now the summons is  
for believers to leave  
their journey through  
the wilderness of this  
world to be safely  
united in heaven  
with their Lord!*

**With the trumpet of God.** So often on their wilderness journey, the Israelites had been summoned together to be on the move (See Numbers 10). Now the summons is for believers to leave their journey through the wilderness of this world to be safely united in heaven with

their Lord!

**And the dead in Christ shall rise first.** Far from missing out on the blessing of the Lord's coming, those who have died will be with Him just before the living who are waiting for Him!

**Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** So at last all living believers together with all those who have died in Christ will be united in His presence – **“to depart and be with Christ, which is far better”** (Philippians 1:23). It should be noted that the place of this great assembling is **“in the air”**. The air is Satan's domain since he is described as **“the prince of the power of the air”** (Ephesians 2:2). But his power is impotent in the presence of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus! It is interesting that

*So at last will be fulfilled the faithful promise of the Lord Jesus, “...that where I am, there you may be also”*

the Greek verb translated ‘meet’ is used only in two other places in the New Testament (Matthew 25:6; Acts 28:15). On both those occasions, the word is used to describe a meeting up together followed by a going in together. So at last will be fulfilled the faithful promise of the Lord Jesus,

**“...that where I am, there you may be also”** (John 14:3). **“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”** (Revelation 22:20).

There are other important scriptures which shed further light on our Christian hope. **“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life”** (see 2 Corinthians 5:1-8). We saw in chapter 1 that man is a tripartite being – body, soul and spirit. At death, the body is laid aside, no longer needed as a dwelling place, but the soul and spirit live on. That state Paul describes in these verses as naked or unclothed. But he looks forward to that day beyond death when he would be **‘further clothed’** with his **‘habitation which is**

**from heaven’** – a new resurrection body. So may we all!

Paul further describes that hope in Philippians 3:20,21: **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself”**. So often had Paul groaned in his lowly body (or **‘body of humiliation’** as it has been translated). Hear him cry, **“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** (Romans 7:19,24). Have we not felt the same? But Paul could rejoice at the prospect of **“being conformed to His glorious body”**. So John writes, **“Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”** (1 John 3:2)!

*“...we know  
that when He  
is revealed,  
we shall be  
like Him, for  
we shall see  
Him as He is”*

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 15, that great chapter of resurrection, just as chapter 13 is the great chapter of love, Paul deals with the resurrection of the body. We will take a brief look at what he writes:

**“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies and what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain – perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed a body... So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body... Behold, I tell you a**

**mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (vv.35-58).** Herein lies our Christian hope. Incidentally, the agricultural pictures which Paul uses here of sowing i.e. planting in the ground and of new growth arising from the ground, would seem to indicate that, for the Christian, burial rather than cremation is the better option.

*This joyous but sobering  
fact faces both the  
Christian and the  
unbeliever with very  
different challenges.*

There is coming a day in this world’s history when, in a moment of time, people all over the world will suddenly no longer be here in this world. The Lord Jesus will have come and taken every Christian home to glory! This joyous but sobering fact faces both the Christian and the unbeliever with very different challenges. But they must be the subject of our next chapter.

## **Exam 3 - The Christian's Hope**

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. In the Old Testament, the number of people who are recorded as going to heaven without dying is
  - a. 0
  - b. 2
  - c. 4
2. Before His death, the Lord Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in
  - a. the new Jerusalem
  - b. His Father's house
  - c. a safe country
3. The apostle John was banished for his faith to the isle of
  - a. Crete
  - b. Patmos
  - c. Sicily
4. When the Lord Jesus comes to take His church to be with Him in heaven
  - a. living believers will be taken first
  - b. dead believers will be taken first
  - c. the living and the dead will be taken together
5. The promise that one day believers will be like the Lord Jesus "for we shall see Him as He is" is made by
  - a. Paul
  - b. Peter
  - c. John

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. Enoch walked with God for 365 years before he was taken to heaven without dying.
7. Stephen was the first Christian martyr.
8. Paul was with the infant church in Thessalonica for one month.
9. The Lord Jesus will send the archangel Gabriel to bring His church to heaven.
10. The apostle John's prayer as he closes the book of Revelation is "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that it was "for the joy set before Him" the Lord Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). What do you see as the components of that joy?

## Chapter 4

### Be Prepared!

‘Be prepared!’ has been the motto of the Scouts’ organisation since 1907. It is currently in use in various languages by millions of Scouts throughout the world. It has become part of popular thinking and is adopted as good advice by most people. What cook would think of baking a cake without first checking that all the required ingredients were at hand? Who would set out on a journey overseas without first making sure that they had their passport with them? Who would set out from home without a raincoat when the weather forecast is for heavy rain? In so many of the ordinary situations of life, most people take care to make adequate preparation for what lies ahead. Yet in this most certain aspect of life in this world, that one day it will come to an end, most are happy to carry on with little or no preparation!

The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us: ***“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth”*** (7:2-4). In common speech, it might be put, ‘It is better to go to a funeral than to a party’. Most people would react with surprise at such a statement!

*‘It is better to go to a funeral than to a party’.*

Yet before we dismiss this statement out of hand, we should remember two things. They are the words of King Solomon.



When Solomon had only recently ascended to the throne of his father, David, God appeared to him in a dream by night and said, **“Ask! What shall I give you?”** Imagine being given a blank cheque, as it were, from God! The mind boggles at such a thought. We read, **“And Solomon said, ‘You have shown great mercy to your servant David my father...Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in...Therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people...’ Then God said to him: ‘Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself...see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you’”** (see 1 Kings 3:5-13). It is not for nothing that the expression ‘as wise as Solomon’ is part of common speech today (see also 1 Kings 4:29-34).

Secondly, we should remember that though these are the words of Solomon which have passed into the Scriptures, as Paul reminded Timothy, **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally ‘is God-breathed’), and is profitable...”** (2 Timothy 3:16). More than being just the words of Solomon, they are the words of God Himself to Solomon but also to us in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to take note of them!

God in His love for us would remind us, then, of the importance of facing up to the fact that our lives in this world must one day come to an end. We cannot just bury our heads, ostrich-like, in the sand, and think it will never happen. In life, we are continually being faced with decisions, some with major consequences, others with less important consequences for our

*God in His love for us would remind us, then, of the importance of facing up to the fact that our lives in this world must one day come to an end.*

lives. What shall I wear? What shall I eat today? Whom shall I marry? What job do I want to do? But the decisions we make in this life can have consequences not only for this life but also for eternity! We can trust Christ as our Saviour, accepting the fact that on the cross of Calvary He took the judgment of God for our sins. John tells us in his Gospel: **“For God so loved the world**

*...the decisions we  
make in this life can  
have consequences  
not only for this life  
but also for  
eternity!*

**that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (3:16). Sadly, we may refuse God’s offer of salvation through His Son and pass into an eternity of separation from God, where we will suffer His righteous judgment for our sins. The Lord Jesus Himself promises, **“Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”** (John 5:24). Be prepared!

We need to recognise, too, that there is no second chance for salvation in some afterlife. The Lord Jesus Himself made this absolutely clear. He told this parable:

**“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table ... So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then 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 in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you**

**are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us”** (Luke 16:19-31).

**“There is a great gulf fixed.”** Those solemn words must demand our serious consideration. Some speak of death-bed repentance. We saw in chapter 2 that one of the thieves who were crucified with the Lord Jesus did turn to Him confessing his sins and received from the Lord Jesus the promise of a place in Paradise that day with the Saviour. But the other thief, sadly, passed into a Christless eternity. It is true that in the grace of

*Trusting Christ  
as one's  
personal  
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of one's life.*

God, some have come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus at the very end of their lives, but how many others have, through accident or serious illness, been suddenly ushered into that same Christless eternity. Trusting Christ as one's personal Saviour is far too important to risk leaving until nearing the end of one's life.

Indeed, God, through His servant Paul, tells us, **“In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation”** (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you have not already done so, reader please take these words to heart now. **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31).

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, **“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (9:27). After death, there is a judgment both for the believer in Christ and the unbeliever. For the believer, as we have seen, the words of the Lord Jesus assure us that this is not a judgment unto condemnation (John 5:24). The believer's place in heaven is assured through the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. But Paul tells us,

**“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or**

**absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:9,10).**

Paul also describes that time:

**“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).**

As believers, we need to live keeping that Day in mind so that we, too, might hear our Lord’s commendation, **“Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your lord”** (Matthew 25:21). The couplet reminds us:

*As believers, we need to live  
keeping that Day in mind so  
that we, too, might hear our  
Lord’s commendation,*

Only one life; ’twill soon be past.

Only what’s done for Christ will last!

The words of the Lord Jesus are a salutary reminder:

**“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).**

Be prepared!

**“After this the judgment.”** But for the unbeliever, that certain

day of judgment is a most solemn and serious matter. **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31). John describes that day to us:

**“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:12-15).

*Be prepared!*

Reader, if your eternal future is not blessedly secure in Christ as your Saviour, trust in Him now! Be prepared!

So far, we have dealt only with those spiritual considerations which have to do with the end of life in this world since these are by far the most important considerations. There are, of course, other practical considerations that should be borne in mind and it will be useful to deal briefly with some of these.

*There are, ...  
practical  
considerations  
that should be  
born in mind ...*

Perhaps the most important of these is the making of a will so that it is made perfectly clear what you want to happen with any money or possessions which you will leave behind. This will is best drawn up in consultation with a solicitor so that the correct legal terminology will ensure that matters are dealt with exactly as you wish. You will then need to let someone in your family or a trusted friend know where the will is kept. This may be with the solicitor or at home.

Another important consideration to bear in mind is that the average life expectancy in this country has risen considerably over recent generations. As a consequence, old age can bring its problems, particularly dementia, so that sadly one becomes incapable of making rational decisions especially concerning financial and health matters. It can be helpful therefore, while still in reasonable health, to set up lasting powers of attorney in which you nominate one or two trusted members of your family or close friends to make these decisions for you. These will need to be made through a solicitor and may cover finance or health or both.

Finally, you should think about the kind of funeral arrangements you would wish to be made. This may involve where you would like the funeral to take place, what kind of funeral service you would want and who would take it, flowers or no flowers or some charity to be nominated for gifts in lieu of flowers. Again, these preferences should be made known to some member of your family or a close friend.

## **Exam 4 - Be Prepared!**

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. The young King Solomon asked God to give him
  - a. great riches
  - b. an understanding heart
  - c. a powerful empire
2. The scriptures have come to us because
  - a. they represent the best thinking of holy men
  - b. their writing spans some 1,600 years
  - c. they were given by inspiration of God
3. The Lord Jesus promises us eternal life if we
  - a. live good lives
  - b. go to church regularly
  - c. believe in Him
4. Believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ
  - a. to see if they are good enough for heaven
  - b. for reward
  - c. for punishment
5. The Lord Jesus teaches us that we
  - a. need to have a healthy bank balance
  - b. need to lay up treasure in heaven
  - c. can do what we like with our money

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. The book of Ecclesiastes was written by King David.
7. King Solomon was renowned for his wisdom.
8. God tells us in the Bible that now is the Day of salvation.
9. After death, God gives everybody a second chance to believe in the Lord Jesus.
10. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is the only foundation for life.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

If you knew for certain that the Lord Jesus was returning tomorrow, what changes would you want to make in your life?

## Chapter 5

### Personal Bereavement

In this chapter we consider personal bereavement and in chapter 6 we will look at dealing with the bereaved. Personal bereavement must rank among the most difficult of life's experiences. There is no standard pattern of grieving. The bereaved may face a variety of emotions including sadness, guilt for things said and not said, done and not done, anger as to why this has happened, and possibly depression. In this chapter, we will concentrate on the spiritual resources available to the Christian to help him or her through this difficult time.

Paul's triumphant outburst of praise in Romans 8:35-39 needs to be read, even through tears, and dwelt upon: ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** Cling to the fact that God still loves you and will be with you throughout these difficult days!

*Cling to the fact  
that God still loves  
you and will be  
with you through-  
out these difficult  
days!*



Joseph Medlicott Scriven was born in Dublin in the Republic of Ireland on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1819. He was engaged to be married but his bride-to-be drowned as a result of a tragic boating accident only hours before the wedding ceremony. He was, however, brought to saving faith in Christ as a result of that accident. He later emigrated to Canada where once again he fell in love and was due to be married in 1860 but that lady sadly died of pneumonia before the wedding. He is best known as the author of the well-known hymn, 'What a Friend we have in Jesus'. The first verse runs as follows:

What a Friend we have in Jesus  
All our sins and griefs to bear;  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer.  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear;  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer.

That hymn has brought comfort to Christians in many difficult situations in succeeding years. While the words were, no doubt, born out of his own difficult experiences, they were not written for his personal comfort. The words were first sent as a poem to his mother who was going through particularly trying circumstances back in Ireland. Only later did they become a hymn. Joseph himself died in Port Hope, Canada on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1886.

*The words were first sent as a poem to his mother who was going through particularly trying circumstances ...*

We need now to look at the way in which the Lord Jesus tenderly dealt with grieving families. There are three such occasions mentioned in Scripture: Jairus and his wife who had just lost their twelve year old daughter (Mark 5:22-43); a widow who was on her way to bury her son (Luke 7:11-16); and Mary and

Martha whose brother, Lazarus, had been buried for four days (John 11:1-44). This latter incident will repay our further study, for here the friendship and sympathy of the Lord Jesus truly shine out.

Martha and Mary, together with their brother, Lazarus, lived in the village of Bethany which was about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus had been welcomed into their home some time earlier (Luke 10:38-42). From then on, Bethany held a special place in His affections. We know this from the fact that during the week before His trial, after a long day spent in Jerusalem, Jesus was still prepared to make that two mile walk at the end of the day to be with them in Bethany. Moreover, as the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, Bethany would be amongst the last places He would see (Luke 24:50). This affection clearly was not based on any pleasing geographical features, for Scripture tells us little about these, but rather on the people who lived there.

But now Lazarus had fallen ill. This was no ordinary illness for the sisters, in their desperation, send to Jesus. We read, ***“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha...Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’ When Jesus heard that, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”*** (John 11:1-5). Notice two things about these verses. Firstly, through the illness and

*... God was going to work out  
His own purposes of blessing,  
not only for this family but  
also for many others.*

subsequent death of Lazarus, God was going to work out His own purposes of blessing, not only for this family but also for many others. So after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, we read,

***“Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the***

**things Jesus did, believed in Him”** (v.45). Secondly, the death of Lazarus was not an act of judgment on God’s part, for each member of the family is singled out as being loved by Jesus. This statement is all the more remarkable in so far as although the love of God for all mankind is a common theme of Scripture (see John 3:16), relatively few individuals are specifically singled out in this fashion.

*God has not  
abandoned you  
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but has His  
own purposes  
in it.*

God has not abandoned you in your bereavement, but has His own purposes in it. Nor has He ceased to love you in any way. Cling to the fact that nothing **“shall be able to separate [you] from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus [your] Lord”** (Romans 8:39).

David could write, **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”** (Psalm 23:4).

Within His loving purposes for the family, the Lord Jesus did not arrive in Bethany until four days after Lazarus had died (v.39) and had already been buried. As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha meets Him and pours out her troubled soul. In return she received from the Lord Jesus that triumphant declaration which has brought comfort to many in their bereavement down through the centuries, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”** (vv.25,26). For the believer in the Lord Jesus, though bereavement necessarily brings about a physical separation on earth, there is the confident looking forward to a reunion in heaven, together with the Lord ( 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-17). It is surely significant that in this passage Paul writes, **“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen**

*For the  
believer ...  
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forward to a  
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together  
with the  
Lord.*

***asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope***” (v.13). Note that Paul does not tell these young believers, ‘Don’t sorrow’, for sorrow is one of our God-given emotions, so perfectly seen in the Lord Jesus, as we have already observed. They had parted company on earth with those believers who had died but they had the sure hope that they would see them again in heaven for an eternity.

Mary had stayed in the house but comes to the sepulchre when Jesus calls her. We read, ***“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’”*** Those two words, ***‘Jesus wept’***, the shortest verse in our English Bible, are so full of meaning and it is worth considering them.

The Greek word translated ***‘wept’*** in our English Bible is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It is as though, in the inspiration of God, it has been specially kept for this occasion. The word literally means ‘shed real tears’. It contrasts with the word used generally for weeping and which describes the prevailing Jewish custom of paying professional mourners who would come and make loud wailing. There could be no doubting

*There could be no doubting the sympathy of Jesus and His personal distress on this sad occasion.*

the sympathy of Jesus and His personal distress on this sad occasion. He must have wept at the havoc which sin and its consequence, death, had brought into the world which, when He had created it, was pronounced ***‘very good’*** (Genesis 1:31). But He wept, too, at the ache which He knew was in the hearts of Martha and Mary even though He knew that shortly He would restore their brother, Lazarus, to them! His sympathy and understanding is perfect. So the writer to the Hebrews would

encourage us, ***“We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”*** (Hebrews 4:15,16). That same help is freely available to you today.

We should just notice, too, that in the Greek in which the New Testament was originally written, the shortest verse is ***“Rejoice always”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:16). It is remarkable that these two verses, which between them encompass the whole range of human emotions from deepest joy to deepest sadness, are linked in this special way. Significantly, these are the same emotions which would be experienced in Jesus’ first miracle (or sign) which John describes in his Gospel, the wedding at Cana of Galilee (see chapter 2) and Jesus’ last miracle, the raising of Lazarus.

Finally, we should remember that our God is the God of all comfort. So Paul writes to the Corinthians, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God”*** (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

Experience shows that it is those who have known the pain of close personal bereavement themselves who are best able to reach out to others in that situation.

*Experience shows that it is those who have known the pain of close personal bereavement themselves who are best able to reach out to others in that situation.*

We need to trust in God’s loving sovereignty. Job was a man who loved God. He probably lived around the time of the patriarch, Abraham. In one day, he lost all his family of seven sons and three daughters and all his wealth. What was his

response? We read, ***“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshipped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD’”*** (Job 1:20,21). Not long after, he would say, ***“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”*** (13:15).

*Grief is an intensely personal thing and there is no set pattern of grieving.*

Grief is an intensely personal thing and there is no set pattern of grieving. No two individuals are the same. That variety is simply a reflection of the character of God who created us. The psalmist writes, ***“O LORD, how manifold (or, all-varied) are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all”*** (Psalm 104:24). How many shades of green there are in creation! No two human fingerprints are the same! Paul writes, ***“...God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities, and powers, in the heavenly places”*** (Ephesians 3:9,10). That variety in creation carries through to His purposes for His children. Finally, Peter writes, ***“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”*** (1 Peter 4:10). That same grace of God comes to each one of us in a variety of ways reflecting the character of the God who made us!

Do not be put off by those who might feel that you are grieving for too long. ‘Time is a great healer’ is a popular saying. God will bring you through your grieving in His own way and time. The pain may not totally go away but you will gradually be able to take up the threads of life again. Equally, do not be put off by those who might feel that you have got over your bereavement too quickly. Indeed, those whose bereavement was preceded by a lengthy time of looking after the one they loved will often tell you that they did most of their

*God will bring you through your grieving in His own way and time.*

grieving while their loved one was still alive.

Finally, it is worth noting that :

Age Concern have issued a series of helpful booklets dealing with death and bereavement.

The Bible Society has helpful information on its website about planning a funeral.

SGM Lifewords has a helpful booklet called 'Living with loss'.

## Exam 5 - Personal Bereavement

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. Paul tells us that we can be
  - a. conquerors
  - b. conquerors some of the time
  - c. more than conquerors
2. In prayer, the Christian can bring to God
  - a. only major worries
  - b. only minor worries
  - c. everything
3. The Lord Jesus raised Lazarus when he had been dead for
  - a. 1 day
  - b. 2 days
  - c. 4 days
4. At the graveside of Lazarus, the Lord Jesus
  - a. asked for quietness
  - b. wept
  - c. was silent
5. Grieving time for anyone who has been bereaved should be
  - a. as long as the person requires
  - b. 1 week
  - c. 1 month

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. Only major disasters can separate the Christian from the love of God.
7. We read in the Gospels of 3 people whom the Lord Jesus raised from the dead.
8. The youngest person the Lord Jesus raised from the dead was 12 years old.
9. The death of Lazarus was an act of God's judgement on the family at Bethany.
10. God comforts us in our sorrow only to show His great power.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What times can you look back on when you proved the peace that comes when "we carry everything to God in prayer"?



## Chapter 6

### Dealing with the Bereaved

In the previous chapter, we looked at how the Christian might cope with personal bereavement. In the nature of things and in the mercy of God, that is a situation which for most of us does not occur too frequently. In this chapter, however, we shall look at how best we might deal with those who have been bereaved

*How best can we  
show compassion...?*

and with whom we come into contact in the daily round of life. These are situations which confront many of us from time to time and we need to be prepared.

How best can we show our compassion?

We should begin by reminding ourselves that our God is a God of compassion: ***“But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious”*** (Psalm 86:15); ***“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion”*** (Psalm 111:4); ***“The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy”*** (Psalm 145:8). That compassion is expected to be shown by those who belong to Him: ***“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD...he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous”*** (Psalm 112:1,4). Note particularly that characteristic of God, ***‘full of compassion’***, and that same characteristic is expected to be seen in those who are His.

In chapter 5, we looked at the way in which *the Lord* dealt compassionately with those who had been bereaved. As we

trace Him in the Gospels, we see that compassion time and time again. **“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd”** (Matthew 9:36); **“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched [the leper], and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed’”** (Mark 1:41). Note particularly the words **‘moved with compassion’**. For the Lord Jesus, compassion was more than just an emotion; rather for Him that emotion was always translated into practice.

*For the Lord Jesus, compassion was more than just an emotion; rather for Him that emotion was always translated into practice.*

Interestingly, in the teaching of the Lord Jesus too, we see that same blend of emotion and practice. Two of His best known parables are those of the Good Samaritan and of the Prodigal Son. So of the Samaritan we read, **“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine...”** (Luke 10:33,34). Of that son’s father, as his penitent son returned home, we read, **“But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him”** (Luke 15:20).

Those of us who profess to be followers of the Lord Jesus must seek to be like Him, **“leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps”** (1 Peter 2:21). The apostle Peter had himself experienced that deep compassion of the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about His impending crucifixion at Jerusalem, He said, **“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you** (plural, i.e. all the disciples), **that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you** (Peter individually), **that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me,**

*The apostle Peter had himself experienced that deep compassion of the Lord Jesus.*

**strengthen your brethren”** (Luke 22:31,32). The Lord’s particular concern for Peter individually is especially important. Later, when the Lord Jesus was on trial for His life, Peter three times denied that he knew Him. We read, **“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter...then Peter went out and wept bitterly”** (Luke 22:61,62). I believe that look was one of utter compassion, never to be forgotten by Peter, and it broke his heart! Later, as part of the charge, **‘Strengthen your brethren’,** he would write, **“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous”** (1 Peter 3:8).

The apostle John writes scathingly of those who fail to translate that compassion into action: **“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** (1 John 3:17). We live in a world that today desperately needs that compassion of the Lord Jesus being demonstrated by those who belong to Him. The philosopher John Donne (1571-1631) wrote, ‘No man is an island, entire of itself’. Some 500 years later, those words are still true. But more importantly still, they represent the plain teaching of Scripture from the early days of the Christian church. So the apostle Paul writes to the Christians at Rome, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”** (Romans 12:15). As Paul reminded the believers at Corinth that they were all members of Christ’s body, His church, he

*‘None are true saints except those who have the true character of compassion and concern to relieve the poor, needy and afflicted.’*

writes, **“...the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it”** (1 Corinthians 12:26). Jonathan Edwards (1703-1757), the North American Christian philosopher

and preacher writes, ‘None are true saints except those who have the true character of compassion and concern to relieve the poor, needy and afflicted.’ We do well to take these words to heart!

Following a bereavement, those who have been bereaved sometimes notice that acquaintances may cross the road in order to avoid having to speak to them. This can cause hurt. This reluctance to meet is not generally a lack of compassion but rather the embarrassment of lacking the right words to say or the fear of saying the wrong thing and reawakening sorrow. For those who suffer in this way, let us remember the difficulty Moses felt when God called him to go to Pharaoh and say, **“Let My people go”**. Remember that Moses had been brought up as Pharaoh’s daughter’s son in the palace. He would have been given the best possible education and would be well used to occupying positions of responsibility.

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Listen to how he pleads with God: **“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before or since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”** (Exodus 4:10). Then we read, **“So the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say’”** (vv.11,12).

Jeremiah had a similar problem. He was called by God to deliver a solemn message of judgment upon the southern kingdom of Judah for its idolatry. We read, **“Then said I, ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.’ But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak...” Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’”**(Jeremiah 1:6-9).

There is one last example for the encouragement of slow speakers. In the latter half of the book of the prophet Isaiah, there is a series of so-called Servant songs which are generally

held to be prophetic of the Lord Jesus and His ministry. In one of these we read, ***“The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned (or, instructed), that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned (or, instructed). The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious”*** (Isaiah 50:4,5). The Gospels plainly show us how these words were amply fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord

*So as we seek to serve the Lord  
in this ministry of compassion,  
we can surely expect to receive  
some similar help.*

Jesus: ***“So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth”*** (Luke 4:22). So as we

seek to serve the Lord in this ministry of compassion, we can surely expect to receive some similar help. Don’t be put off!

In her hymn, ‘Lord, speak to me that I may speak’, Frances Ridley Havergal has written:

O give Thine own sweet rest to me,  
that I may speak with soothing power  
a word in season as from Thee,  
to weary ones in needful hour.

In the end, our body language – a smile, a hug, a kiss, a warm handshake, may be a more effective means of communicating compassion than our words.

It is worth taking note of how the ever practical James defines religion in his epistle: ***“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”*** (James 1:27). Significantly, those singled out here, orphans and widows, are those who have suffered bereavement.

It might be useful to conclude this chapter with a look at things which are either helpful or unhelpful to one who has been

bereaved. These suggestions have been obtained from those who have experienced bereavement. They are looked at under the headings of 'helpful' and 'not helpful'. In each section, they are listed without any order of priority.

### **What is helpful to the one who has been bereaved**

Remember each individual is different. The reaction of one individual may be different from that experienced by another.

Cards and letters of condolence are helpful, particularly if they share some appreciation and/or memories of the one who has died. (Why do we wait until someone has died before we express our appreciation of them?) For the Christian who has been bereaved, a suitable verse of Scripture can be helpful. For the bereaved without any Christian faith, it may still be appropriate to remind them that God is only a prayer away.

Simple text messages in the ensuing days let the bereaved know that they are still being thought of - "I'm thinking of you"; "I'm praying for you"; a short Bible verse.

Practical help – bake some cakes; a flask of soup; a casserole. These will all help relieve pressure in the household in the days immediately following bereavement. Some flowers may help lighten the sadness. Subsequently give an invitation to a meal; offer help with shopping, gardening, transport.

Keep the dead person's memory alive. The bereaved need to know that the one they have lost is still valued. The dead person can not be simply air-brushed out of existence.

For the Christian, it is helpful to know that people are praying for you and, when the occasion presents itself, will pray with you.

Remember the whole family is bereaved. In ensuing days, it is easy to remember the husband or wife but, where there are children, they are still mourning and should not be

forgotten.

Recognise that the first time a bereaved person is in a familiar situation without their spouse e.g. at a church service or some setting outside the home, is a terrific challenge.

### **What is not helpful**

Do not phone unless absolutely necessary. The phone can be very intrusive. The bereaved need time and space to grieve. What is said over the phone may be quickly forgotten whereas a note or a card can be read time and again and continue to give comfort.

Do not say, “I know how you feel.” We saw in chapter 5 that grief is a very personal thing. We are all different. It is much better to say, “I remember my heartache when...”

Do not say, “How are you?” when meeting the bereaved on a particular outside occasion. It may only provoke tears. It is better to say, “Glad you could make it” or something similar.

Let them grieve in their own time – do not pressure recovery.

## Exam 6 - Dealing with the Bereaved

**Write the correct answer in the space provided:**

1. “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion” is found in
  - a. Psalm 86:14
  - b. Psalm 111:4
  - c. Psalm 145:9
2. The Lord Jesus was moved with compassion when He met
  - a. a leper
  - b. a tax collector
  - c. a Pharisee
3. Peter tells us the Lord Jesus left us an example so that we can follow
  - a. His teaching
  - b. His commands
  - c. His steps
4. Who said, “Lord, I am not eloquent”?
  - a. Peter
  - b. Moses
  - c. Joshua
5. When God commissioned Jeremiah to deliver His message, He touched Jeremiah’s
  - a. hands
  - b. feet
  - c. mouth

**Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:**

6. James tells us that pure religion is to go to church regularly.
7. It is unhelpful to pressure someone who has been bereaved to a quick recovery.
8. In the parable Jesus told, the wounded traveller was helped by the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan.
9. It was Peter who urged his readers to “weep with those who weep”.
10. It is generally helpful to share with someone who has been bereaved happy memories of the one who has died.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What ways are there in which you might feel able and willing to help someone who has been bereaved?



