

# *The Living Hope*

April 12, 2009

Epitaph, a commemorative inscription on a tombstone, has a tendency to summarize the life of the dead person in the grave. Some are serious, some are down right hilarious and some are thought provoking.

Here are a few examples:

- Here lies Johnny Yeast. Pardon me for not rising.
- Professor S. B. McCracken School is out; Teacher has gone home.
- On Ezekiel Pease:  
Pease is not here, only his pod; He shelled out his Peas and went to his God
- On a lawyer's epitaph in England:  
Sir John Strange. Here lies an honest lawyer. And that is Strange.
- On an attorney:  
John E. Goembel 1867-1946 "The defense rests"
- Here lies an atheist; All dressed up and no place to go.  
Thurmont, Maryland

That atheist still didn't get it right even to his death. There are only two places to go when a person dies – heaven or hell.

## ***A. LIFE AFTER DEATH – A FASCINATING SUBJECT***

Life after death has been a fascinating subject to talk about. Because it is unknown and many people want to get glimpses of it without actually experiencing death. If the truth be known even a staunch atheist, in secret, wants to have hope for the life after death.

A little over a month before he died, the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre declared that he so strongly resisted feelings of despair that he would say to himself, "I know I shall die in hope." Then in profound sadness, he would add, "But hope needs a foundation." And he absolutely did not have it.

While I was preparing this study on Friday night, I typed in 'life after death' in the Google search engine. There were 73,100,000 results found. If you go to just about any bookstore except our Chapel Bookstore, you will be able to find dozens of books exploring this very subject.

Many of them give the testimonies of certain people who have allegedly died, and come back to life. Usually the stories are somewhat similar. They all claim to have had an experience of passing through a dark tunnel to light beyond and being met by a "being of light" who says very kind and considerate things to them but always sends them back into this life to pick it up again and live a few more years.

I think their testimonies have something to do with some bad burritos they had a couple nights before. As you can tell, I am totally unimpressed by those testimonies. I find them seriously lacking in any biblical credibility for two basic reasons.

## 1) You die once, not a gazillion times.

*Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*

Many cults, like the New Age movement which is influenced by the eastern religion adopts the idea of reincarnation and enlightenment through the life cycle. It is a bogus idea and it is generated from the pit of hell. We all die once and we don't come back as another person or life being.

I don't believe that these people with so-called life after death experience were really, really dead for them to have these kinds of testimonies. If you really ask them if they actually died, they would say, "It was a near death experience," not a completely, clinically pronounced death.

According to the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association, the definition of death is:

The permanent cessation of all vital bodily functions – an absence of spontaneous circulatory, respiratory and cardiac functions as well as irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem.

I think that for anyone who has this situation can be considered so dead.

## 2) The common denominator – a "being of light" cannot be trusted

*2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*

Let's face it, people are gullible, are we not? Just because some fancy life after death books were in the New York Times Best Seller List for awhile, people are more than willing to believe their stories, but they are not willing to believe the truth from the Bible. They would believe that these authors would not lie. They might have not lied but they could be seriously deceived by satan. 2 Corinthians 11:14 clearly tells us that satan disguised himself as an angel of light. We cannot trust anything that comes from satan.

## **B. WHAT KIND OF HOPE DO YOU HAVE?**

What is the main reason for such a curiosity for the life after death by so many people? As I have mentioned it before, it is about hope for unknown. The problem with this idea is that everything they are hoping is vague. There is no absolute assurance for what they want to believe. Some might say, "What about the Bible? Where is there any assurance of the life after death that the Bible claims?"

The assurance of the Bible's claim about the life after death is in the authenticity of the Bible. For thousands of years, the Bible proves itself to be the Word of God by telling the truth scientifically even though it is not a science book, archaeologically, geographically and prophetically. In other words, the Bible has a perfect track record in speaking the truth so that people can put their hope in God.

One thing the French atheist Jean-Paul Sartre was right about is that hope needs a solid foundation. The unbelievers' hope for the unknown future is nothing more than wishful thinking based on a vague idea.

Not having a biblically grounded hope for the future also reflects in an individual's life. Either they want to fill their lives with boastful things of the world or they are living the life of defeat, despair or self-deception. I am sure that there might be occa-

sional happiness and fun. But when that temporary fun is over, and that person settles down and thinks about his distant future, he still has no hope.

### **C. ARE YOU AT YOUR WIT'S END?**

You might be at the wit's end. Your marriage might be falling apart. You don't remember when was the last you had nice conversations with your spouse. Those who are around you suggest about dumping that person and starting new. You are starting to think that it may not be such a bad idea. But you still are wondering if there is any hope for this marriage.

Or you might go through a tremendous burden of guilt. It is not that you've killed someone physically, but your guilt has been laying down on you for a long time. It seems that you don't remember a moment that you were free from the condemnation of a guilty conscience. You are wondering if there is any hope of forgiveness from God and from the other person.

When you are not sure if there is any hope for future, it makes you to be confused and it takes all the strength out of a person.

No one understand hopeless feeling better than one of Jesus Christ's disciples Peter. He had boasted that he would not leave Jesus or forsake Him, he even declared that he would stay true and fight for Him even unto death. He meant so well, but he failed so miserably. When the moment came, a little slave girl's question at the high priest's home scared living daylight out of Peter, and melted all his courage, and he denied his Lord, not once but three times.

It was horrible enough for him to face their Lord Jesus' death on the cross, now he added the shame and disgrace of his own denial. It is no wonder why he went to the dark of the night and wept bitterly.

### **D. JESUS CHRIST OUR LIVING HOPE**

But that was not the end of this burly apostle Peter. We then have that wonderful scene in John's Gospel where, by the shores of Galilee, Jesus appeared again to his disciples and prepared a breakfast for them. He restored Peter as His disciple and gave him a living hope in God.

*1Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*

Peter speaks of this as a living hope, and living means it is something that comes to us every day. It is something that is available all the time. Jesus Christ alive from the dead is the answer to all the broken dreams, the dashed hopes of your life and mine, the pressures that we feel everyday at work and home, the sense of our failure and the inability to perform as we would like to perform.

In the New Testament you can see how these early Christians were filled with a constant sense of the presence of Jesus with them. Everywhere they went they did so with joy and optimism and expectation. When you read the book of Acts you see that from beginning to end it has a ring of triumph.

The Scriptures assure us that there are two things that always are promised to them:

1) **We are given the assurance that we will not be alone.**

*Hebrews 13:5b For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

We have this promise, whether we feel it or not, that we will not be left alone because He is with us. God's love does not keep us from trials but sees us through them.

Things may not turn out to be the way you want. But while you go through that difficult journey, you get to learn that you can have hope in God.

2) **We are told that we need have no fear about death.**

Christ promises to us that there is no ground for fear. I have been struck by the fact that in the Word of God there are 365 places where it says, "Fear not," or "Do not be afraid." Can you ever wonder why that number?

The hope you can have from believing Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord is not a dead hope or vague hope, rather it is the Living Hope. It is the hope that we will be bodily resurrected and our spirits will be in heaven with our Lord Jesus throughout eternity.

### ***E. WHAT DOES JESUS' RESURRECTION MEAN TO US***

*1 Corinthians 15:20-22 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*

1) **It assures our future resurrection.** Because Jesus both died and rose again, we will be raised like Him.

The word "firstfruits" in v20 speaks of a sampling, a foretaste, a glimpse. He is the firstfruit. Jesus has died and has risen, so we know that our resurrected bodies in some way will resemble His resurrection body. To what extent, we cannot be certain. But if they were completely like His, it would mean that we would be clearly recognizable.

2) **The resurrection of Jesus is proof of a future judgment.**

We live in a society, and indeed a world, in which justice is often perverted and neglected. We look at things that happen and say, "How can that be? How could that happen?" The Resurrection means, among other things, that God's justice will ultimately prevail.

3) **The resurrection of Christ gives us power to live the Christian life.**

Certainly the Bible does not teach that we will be sinless in this physical body we now live in. On the other hand, we can sin less, not by our own abilities, but by the power of the Spirit. Christ can make us altogether different kinds of people. God can give you the power to live this Christian life.

I don't have to prove the fact of Jesus' resurrection to you this morning. Whether you believe it or not, it is the fact. The point of this service is about your earthly life and eternal life. Our God Jesus Christ does not push His way into your life like some bully at school. Nor He begs you to be a part of your life. He gave you a life to live and a brain to make a wise choice.

In your emptiness, in your loneliness or despair or whatever it may be, if you respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ to come into your lives, Jesus will come in, and He will

begin to make changes in your life for the better. You will be a born again and have a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The circumstance may not change right away, but you will have Jesus in your heart to go through those difficulties with His strength.

### ***E. THE BOTTOM LINE***

If you are like me, you want the bottom line. Here it is:

If there is no God, there is no hope for anyone.

But if there is God, He is the only hope for everyone.

Call on the name of Jesus Christ, you will be saved.

If you don't, by your own choice, you will not be saved and you will spend your eternal life in hell.

You may say, "That sounds cold and rude." No matter how you cut the truth, the truth is truth. Nobody wants you to make that horrible choice, especially Jesus. He wants you to be saved. Jesus gave His breath for your earthly life, and He gave His death for your eternal life.