

Comfort & Consolation

Death is an overwhelming tragedy. It is so different from other calamities of life. When other misfortunes strike, there is hope that things will get better. If poverty comes, one works harder, and hopes for better times. When sickness occurs, there is hope that health will soon return. But death is the supreme tragedy. It seems so hopeless, so very final, the end of everything. The loved one is gone beyond recall, beyond our help, beyond our reach. The tender ties of a whole lifetime are abruptly broken. The family unit, so tightly knit, is rudely shattered.

A wife loses her husband, or a husband loses his wife, in death. It is as painful as though a part of one's body was torn away; which it has been, in a sense. Did not God say, "they shall be one flesh"? (Genesis 2:24) Or, a father and mother lose their child, the one upon whom they have lavished their love and for whom they had such great plans and high hopes. And children lose their parents, upon whom they have so long depended for love and counsel. In every event of death, the survivors are left sad and lonely, with a great aching emptiness, with a sense of tremendous loss.

It is hardest on those who are left behind. The dead are at rest. They are at peace. They are no longer troubled by the evil and wicked things of this world. In the Bible, Job describes the condition of death thus: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." (Job 3:17) But those who remain are not at rest. Their hearts are torn by grief because of their loss. Every scene and event of their daily lives haunt them with memories of their departed loved one. And they often tend to reproach themselves, that perhaps they had not been so kind, considerate and loving as they should have been, that somehow it might have been because of their fault or neglect that the person died. Such thoughts torment them and greatly add to their grief.

What consolation can we give to those who are thus left behind? What comfort can we impart which will stop their weeping and dry their tears? Human philosophies and reasonings will not do. They are void and empty. Traditional and sectarian views of the hereafter are most unsatisfactory and painful. They hold no real comfort. But in the Bible, the word of God, there is great consolation, and wonderful comfort and hope. There is balm for the soul. There is healing for broken hearts. Every perplexing question concerning life and death and the hereafter is fully and lovingly answered. Some of these questions are: Why do people die? Why does a loving, all-powerful God permit death which brings such terrible sorrow? Why did he take my beloved away from me? What did he do wrong, to deserve death? What did I do wrong? Where are the dead? Are they happy? Are they suffering? Will I ever see my loved one again?

Why do we Die?

The human race was not designed to die, but was made to live forever in health and happiness upon the earth. Adam was created perfect, in God's image, and was commanded to multiply and fill the earth with a race of perfect human beings like himself. (Genesis 1:27, 28) A beautiful garden home was given to him, planted with many fruit-bearing trees, providing perfect food capable of sustaining his life forever. But Adam's continued life was made dependent upon one simple condition: God required obedience of him, just as any father rightly requires obedience from his child. So God applied a test of obedience. He merely required that Adam must not eat the fruit of just one of the many trees in the garden, saying, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die." (Genesis 2:17) Adam failed in this test of obedience. Satan, the devil, prevailed upon Adam's wife, Eve, to eat of the forbidden fruit, and she persuaded Adam to also eat of it. Thereupon God justly passed the sentence of death upon Adam, by driving him out of the garden, thus depriving him of the perfect food necessary for continued life. (Genesis 3:17 to 24)

This is how death started in the world. It was because of Adam's sin of disobedience. And it was after Adam and his wife sinned, and were expelled from the garden, that they had their children. For this reason their children were born imperfect and dying. And these were our ancestors. As it is expressed in Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." So do not reproach yourself over the death of a loved one. It was not because of anything you or he had done. It was not your fault. You are in no way responsible for death in the world. It was solely because of the sin of Adam, and our natural inheritance of its consequences. We were all born sinners, as the Psalmist declares in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." It is because of sin that we were all born dying. As Psalm 89:48 expresses it: "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?"

An Escape from Death

But God did not abandon the world of mankind in such a hopeless condition. He has provided a glorious escape from sin and death. In his great love for his human children, God has provided a Ransom whereby they may be redeemed and return to life again. Thus we read in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in Hosea 13:14: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

What does God mean when he says, "I will *ransom* them from the power of the grave?" "Ransom" means "a price to correspond," or "equivalent price." Because of his disobedience, Adam forfeited his life; and his entire race, born sinners, shared his condemnation to death. Jesus Christ came to earth as a perfect man, physically an exact equivalent of Adam before Adam sinned. But, unlike Adam, Jesus was obedient to God.

He died without deserving to die. As Philippians 2:8 states it, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He sacrificially gave up his perfect, unforfeited life as a "corresponding price" or ransom, in offset for the forfeited life of Adam. This free gift canceled the death penalty, not only for Adam, but also for all of Adam's race who were condemned because of being made sinners by his disobedience. Thus we read in Romans 5:18 and 19, "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." And in Romans 6:23 it is written, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The "corresponding price" of the Ransom which Jesus gave, and the promise that, as a result, all mankind will be raised from the dead, is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:21 and 22, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." And Romans 14:9 tells us "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be the Lord, both of the dead and living." After Jesus died as a man, God raised him from the dead; not as a man, but a mighty spirit being, with power and authority to call all mankind from the grave.

A Firm Basis of Hope

This doctrine of the Ransom is the grandest and most meaningful doctrine taught in the Bible. It is the basis of the only true hope and consolation for the world of mankind, because it provides for the return of the dead to life, the joyful reunion of families parted by death, and their living forever in health and happiness upon the earth.

To some it may seem incredible that our beloved dead will actually live again, and be with us once more, never to part. But in the language of the Apostle Paul, in Acts 26:8, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Cannot the mighty God who originally created man, re-create him if he wishes to? Does he not have the power to do so? Viewed in this manner, the resurrection of the dead is nothing to be surprised about. As we read in John 5:28 and 29, "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."

A Demonstration of Resurrection

Jesus gave a wonderful demonstration of this when he was on earth; a preview, so to speak. The account is found in the eleventh chapter of John. A man named Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, were special friends of Jesus. On one occasion when Jesus was away on a trip, Lazarus took seriously sick. His sisters immediately sent word to Jesus, expecting that he would return and heal Lazarus. But Jesus did not return at once, and Lazarus died. When this happened, Jesus knew it, and told his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Here Jesus likened the condition of death to sleep, from which there will be an awakening. But his disciples misunderstood him, taking his words literally. We read: "Then said his disciples, Lord if

he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death; but they thought that he had spoken of taking rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead."

When Jesus returned, Lazarus had been dead for four days. His sister Martha met Jesus, and sadly said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." She was seeking comfort and consolation of the Master. And what comfort and consolation did Jesus give her? He simply said, "Thy brother shall rise again." He pointed to a resurrection in the future. But Martha missed her brother. She missed him then and there, just as you miss your loved one now. She *knew* he would be resurrected in God's Kingdom on earth in the future. She believed this; but she yearned to have him back then and there. We read from the account: "Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord, I believe. . . ."

Then Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and had the stone that sealed it rolled away. And then, after he had prayed to his Heavenly Father, we read: "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth." Lazarus walked out of the tomb alive! You can well imagine what a great joy it must have been for Martha and Mary to have their dead brother back, alive and well. They still wept, but their tears were now tears of joy instead of sorrow. And that is just the way it will be in Christ's Millennial Kingdom soon to be fully established on earth. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus in John 5:25, "Verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."

This demonstration by Jesus, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is recorded in the Bible for the sake of those who are sorrowing because of the death of a loved one. As Jesus said to Martha, he now says to you, "Your loved one shall rise again! I am the resurrection and the life. I will call him forth and give him back to you, just as I gave Lazarus back to his sisters. Then your sorrow will also turn to joy, just as theirs did."

The Sleep of Death

When Lazarus had died, Jesus said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." Sleep is a very apt illustration of death, being a temporary unconsciousness from which there is an awakening. This is just what death is. When our children retire for the night and go peacefully to sleep, do we sorrow over their condition? Of course not; because we know that they will awaken in the morning. And this is the way it will be with those who are asleep in death. Jesus died as a Ransom, and arose again with the power and authority to awaken the dead to life again. They are said to be "asleep in Jesus." If we believe this, if we have this hope, we can be comforted in our sorrow. While we may be sad and lonely because of the temporary separation, our sorrow will not be hopeless. This is what the Apostle tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and 14, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep; that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also *which sleep in Jesus* will God bring with him."

A Special Consolation

Have you lost a child in death? If so, a very special consolation is given you in the Bible, and assurance that your child will return, that you will actually hold your darling in your arms again, never to die any more.

Matthew 2:16 to 18 records a great tragedy: here we read of the wicked King Herod, that he "was exceeding wrath, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under." Many innocent little children were snatched from their mothers' arms, and ruthlessly slaughtered. Think of the grief this caused! For every slain child, there was a broken-hearted mother left behind, mourning for the tender life cut short, for the tragic waste. Each mother must have said, with a sense of terrible loss, "My poor little baby didn't even have a chance to grow up. What a terrible waste!" A great voice of consolable weeping was heard throughout all that land.

This incident was foretold by the Prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 31:15 to 17. In this prophecy all the mothers who lost their children by Herod's cruel order are collectively termed "Rachel." We read: "Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah; lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." Then God gives us the wonderful and comforting assurance that those lost in death are to return to their families. Jeremiah continued, "Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy (death). And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." And this is to happen soon, when the Kingdom of God is fully established in the earth. And we read of that Kingdom, in Isaiah 65:20 (Revised Version): "No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days." No; they shall grow up and live forever. And not only children, but all loved ones lost in death, young and old, will then return to their families.

No Torment in Death

The sorrow of some is increased and made almost intolerable by the nagging fear that their departed loved one has gone to a place of torment. This is a needless fear. The doctrine of eternal torment is not taught in the Bible. It is based upon mistranslations and misrepresentations of certain passages of Scripture. It is obviously false, because it is entirely contrary to the loving character of God. Since he made us, we know that he is better than we are. Would you torture your child? No matter what he had done, would you even for a moment hold his hand over a flame? Would you torture even an animal? Of course not. No sane person would. So eternal torment is a terrible thing with which to charge our Heavenly Father, and is totally untrue. God is infinitely superior to us. His thoughts and sensibilities are so much higher than ours. If you are kind, loving, merciful and forgiving of your children, he is much more so to his human family. We read of him in Isaiah 55:7 to 9, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our

God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

And the Bible tells us plainly that God would not even *think* of tormenting anyone; that to do such a terrible thing never came into his mind. In ancient times the false gods of Baal and Molech were worshiped by the offering of human sacrifices. Little children were burned alive on the high altars of these gods. The loving God of the Bible considered this an abomination and a sin, totally contrary to his will. Thus we read in Jeremiah 19:5, "They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind." Also in Jeremiah 32:35, "And they built the high places of Baal . . . to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." Does that sound like a God who would prepare a place of eternal fiery torment, or a purgatory, for the vast majority of this human family, as the creeds claim?

The Hell of the Bible

It is obvious that there is something terribly wrong with the teaching of the creeds with respect to hell. The truth is that the "hell" of the Bible is not a place of torment, but represents the condition of death – the grave. This fact is easily proven, and will be of great comfort and reassurance to those who fear the fate of the "unsaved" dead.

We must remember that the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. In the Bible, the abode of the dead is depicted by the Hebrew word *sheol*, and the Greek word *hades*, both of which signify, in those original languages, the hidden, covered, unconscious condition of death – the grave, and nothing more. For example; in Psalm 16:10 of the Old Testament, there is a prophecy concerning Jesus: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (*sheol*); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Here the Hebrew word *sheol* (translated "hell") clearly signifies the grave into which Jesus was to go, and from which he was to be resurrected. Then, in the New Testament, in Acts 2:27, the Apostle Peter quotes this very same prophecy as having been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus; but this time, because written in Greek, the word *hades* is used instead of *sheol*: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (*hades*), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. This demonstrates that the Greek word *hades* is the exact equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and that both words mean *the grave*. This fact is evident because *the grave* is where Jesus, the Holy One of God, went; and we are sure he did not go to a hell of torment.

Another illustration of the true meaning of the Hebrew word *sheol* is found in Genesis 37:35. Here righteous Jacob, thinking Joseph is dead, is mourning for him, saying, "I will go down into the grave (*sheol*) unto my son." In this case the English translators properly used the word "grave" instead of "hell" to translate *sheol*, because for Jacob to expect to join his beloved son in a place of torment would be absurd. Thus it is seen that the translators have not always been consistent, which has resulted in much confusion.

Instead of a place of blazing fire, *sheol* (hell) is described, in Job 10:21, as a state of "darkness." Instead of a place of shrieks and groans, it is described, in Psalm 115:17, as a place of "silence." Instead of representing in any sense pain and suffering, or even remorse, it is described, in Psalm 88:11 and 12, as a place or condition of "forgetfulness." And as to there being any consciousness there, we are told, in Ecclesiastes 9:10, that there is not "knowledge nor wisdom" in *sheol*. Are not these good descriptions of the grave, the state of death?

It was during the dark ages that the true meaning of the words *sheol* and *hades* was perverted by unscrupulous theologians, with the object of frightening the people into subservience. Thus the erroneous and blasphemous doctrine of eternal torment was incorporated in many of the creeds of Christendom.

When the Bible was translated into English several hundred years ago, the Old English word "hell" was often used to translate the words *sheol* and *hades*. This would have been proper enough because, in its original ancient usage, "hell" simply meant to *conceal*, to *hide*, to *cover*; hence, *the concealed, hidden, or covered* place. But because of the creeds, the meaning of the English word "hell" had become distorted in the minds of the people. The word had taken on the connotation of a place of conscious and eternal existence in torment, instead of the unconscious, hidden condition of death, the grave, which it really means, and from which there is to be a glorious resurrection. Regarding the deliverance from the Bible hell, we read in Revelation 1:18 the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died as a Ransom and thus purchased the right to open the prisonhouse of death: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell (*hades*) and of death." In due time, which is now near at hand, he will set the captives free, to return joyfully to life again and rejoin their families. And you may be assured that your loved one will be among them. This is God's plan of salvation for his human children. Our God is not a God of fear and torment.* (*If more information is desired on this important subject, a free book entitled *Where Are the Dead?* will be sent on request.)

What God is Really Like

The Bible tells us what God is really like. Although he permits evil in the world for a time, and disciplines his human children temporarily for their own good, he is as a loving Father to them. We read in Psalm 103:8 to 14, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear (reverence) him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear (reverence) him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." "Like as a father pitieth his children"! This is a tender thought, and means that God knows what you are going through, and is sympathetic with you in your sorrow. And he will help and comfort you if you will let him.

The Love and Mercy of God

We also read of God, in Psalm 145:8 and 9. "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." And we are told in 1 John 4:16 that "God is love." Love is the controlling attribute of God's character. Everything he does is influenced by love. He is loving and merciful to *all*, whether they deserve it or not. He is merciful even to his enemies. We have the words of Jesus, in Matthew 5:44 and 45, "Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." And in Luke 6:35 and 36, "Love your enemies . . . and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Is this the description of a God who will unmercifully and eternally torment millions of his creatures? Of course not! So you need never worry whether your loved one has gone to a hell of torment. There is no such place. The hell of the Bible is the grave, the condition of death. All go there, because all are sinners. As we read in Ecclesiastes 3:20, "All go unto one place. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." And there is no consciousness in death, as is stated in Ecclesiastes 9:5 and 10, "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything. . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest." And describing a man's death, the Psalmist says, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4) There can be no torment in such a condition. The dead are at rest, awaiting a resurrection.

The Experience and Expectation of Job

We have an illustration of this in the experience of Job. He was a godly man, with great riches and a fine family. Suddenly, one misfortune after another befell him. Within a few days all of his children were killed, and he lost his entire fortune. He was stricken with a loathsome disease, with painful boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. He could not lie still, or sleep, or rest. Then even his wife left him. All his friends shunned him except three, and these stayed only in order to reproach him and accuse him of guilt. Job was in such physical pain and mental distress that he cursed the day that he was born, and wished he had never been born. We read in Job 3:2 and 3, 11 and 13, "And Job spake and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born. . . . Why died I not from the womb? . . . For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I should have slept. Then had I been at rest." Job did not know why these troubles had come upon him; but he felt that for some reason God was temporarily angry with him. So he prayed for the temporary oblivion of death; and then to be brought back to life again later on when things had changed for the better. Let us read that prayer from Job 14:13 to 15, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave; that thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be past; that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands."

Yes; Job had the correct expectation. God eagerly desires the return of our beloved dead. That is why he sent his Son to ransom them. They are his creation, the work of his hands; and he does not want them to remain forever lost in death. He holds them lovingly in his memory, and will bring them joyfully back to life again, at a happier time. As in the case of Job, God has appointed a definite time, a "set time," for the resurrection of your departed loved one, too. It will be during the Millennial Age, the Kingdom of God under Christ, which is even now dawning upon the world. By his Son who redeemed them, God will then call, and they will answer.

Some Changed to Spirit Nature

The Bible teaches that humankind is divided into two general categories of persons who will be saved, each class reaping a different destiny – one class an earthly, and the other an heavenly inheritance. The primary salvation is the bringing up of mankind from sin and death, to human perfection and eternal life upon the earth. Adam was never promised a future spirit life in heaven. On the contrary, he was created to live eternally upon the earth. This is evident from Genesis 3:22, which says that he was given the power to "put forth his hand, and take also of the trees of life (perfect food), and eat, and live forever." Where would one live forever, by the act of eating fruit? Obviously, upon the earth. And he was told to multiply and fill the *earth* with a race of perfect human beings like himself. (Genesis 1:28)

But this privilege was conditioned upon his obedience. The alternative was, simply, *death*; not a continuation of life as a spirit being, either in heaven or in a place of torment. God told Adam plainly, in Genesis 2:17, that if disobedient, he would "surely die." Adam failed in the test of obedience, and thereby lost the right to continued human life for himself and all his posterity. Then Jesus came to earth and provided the ransom price, to redeem Adam and his race from death. It was human life upon the earth that was lost for all mankind; and Jesus said, in Matthew 18:11, that he came "to save that which was lost." As a result, every person who has ever lived will be resurrected, and all the willing and obedient will be restored to human perfection, to live forever upon the earth under Edenic conditions. This is the common, or general, salvation. It does not change man's earthly nature nor transport him to heaven.

But besides this earthly salvation, there is another and greater salvation, also based upon Jesus' ransom, which is offered to a limited number of mankind. Those who partake of this greater salvation *do* experience a change of nature, from human to spirit beings. They die as humans, and are resurrected to the glorious, immortal, divine nature, like their Lord. They attain to the heavenly Kingdom of God. Of such it is written in 1 Corinthians 15:42 to 44, 49 to 51 and 53: "It 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 (human) body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. . . . And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. . . . We shall all be changed. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." These are the ones to whom

Jesus said, in John 14:2 and 3, "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . that where I am, there ye may be also." Hebrews 3:1 refers to such as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling."

This greatest salvation is termed in Philippians 3:14, "The prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It is referred to in Hebrews 2:3 as "so *great* salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." Our Lord Jesus opened the way, which is called in Hebrews 10:20, "a new and living way."

The Cost of the Heavenly Kingdom

The way to the heavenly kingdom of God is not easy. It is not for everyone. Jesus describes it thus, in Matthew 7:14, "Strait (difficult) is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it." There must first be a powerful attraction to the precepts of God taught in the Bible. As Jesus said, in John 6:44, "No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." One so drawn accepts Jesus as his personal Saviour. He is justified in the sight of God, and his sins are covered by the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. He consecrates his life to the service of God, obeying the Apostle's injunction in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you . . . brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." All human hopes, ambitions and prospects are laid aside in exchange for the heavenly. From then on such a one is led by the Holy Spirit of God, and becomes a spiritual son of God, as is written in Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." He develops a new, Christ-like mind, and becomes a new person. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Those called to this "high calling" follow the example of Jesus, laying down their lives in sacrifice as he did, and living in accordance with his teachings. Thus they are told in 1 Peter 2:21, "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

These special saintly ones are now being selected from the world, in order to reign with Christ during his Millennial Kingdom for which Christians have so long prayed – "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done *on earth*, as it is in heaven." Having lived upon the earth as humans and having had first-hand knowledge of sin and death, they will be sympathetic and helpful priests in that great time of restitution, administering the primary human salvation to the world of mankind, bringing all the willing and obedient up to human perfection. These are the ones described in Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

Was your beloved dead one of these? If so, although you may sorely miss him, you will not sorrow as others do, who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14) At the moment of death, he was, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," changed to a glorious, immortal spirit being, like his Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:51 to 55; 1 John 3:2)

Precious Promises of God Bring Comfort and Consolation

God has many precious promises in the Bible for your comfort and consolation, and here are some of them:

Have you lost a parent in death? Psalm 27:10 should be a great comfort to you; "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." And Hebrews 13:5, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Did your loved one die of the infirmities of old age? The Bible tells us that this will no longer happen in the Kingdom, but that youth will be regained. We read in Job. 33:25, "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth."

Was it your infant child that died? That will no longer be possible in the kingdom now dawning, because it is written in Isaiah 65:20 (Revised Version), "No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days."

Did your loved one die of sickness? According to Isaiah 33:24 the time is soon coming when "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick;" and God has said, in Jeremiah 33:6, "I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them."

Did your loved one die as the result of violence or accident? We read in Isaiah 11:9 of the time shortly coming – "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain (Kingdom)."

Was the death a result of military action? Isaiah 2:4 tells us that in God's Kingdom, "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Do you often wish that death could be abolished? It has been! We read in 2 Timothy 1:10, "Of our Saviour Jesus Christ, *who hath abolished death*, and hath brought life." On the basis of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, eternal life will soon be offered to all the willing and obedient of the earth.

Is your soul restless because of your grief? There is a wonderful source of rest available in Matthew 11:28 to 30, the words of Jesus: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Do you long for peace of heart and mind? The Apostle says, in Philippians 4:7, "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And Jesus said, in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither

let it be afraid." And how can this peace be attained? We read in Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee."

Are you tired and careworn? In 1 Peter 5:7 God invites you to relieve yourself of your cares – "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." And in Psalm 55:22, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee."

Healing for Broken Hearts

Is your heart broken over the death of your loved one? Be assured by Psalm 34:18; "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart." Let God's sure promise of the resurrection of your loved one be your strength and hope. Psalm 31:24, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." In this connection a faithful and wise Bible student has written: "The home you love must some time break up, the family be scattered or invaded by death. The love that glows upon the human altar may flicker and become dim or extinct. How many have found the high hopes of youth and early life turn to ashes in a few short years or months! To all of these the Word of the Lord should appeal with special force, when calling them to come to Him with their burdens and their broken hearts. His love and His precious promises come like the sweet balm of Gilead to those who, sad and disappointed in the struggle of life, come to Christ for rest and comfort, for life and healing."

If you are a child of God, he knows just what you are now going through. Jesus tells us, in Matthew 10:29 to 31, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without your Heavenly Father's notice, and that you are far more valuable to him than many sparrows. And to indicate how intimately he knows you, and how closely he enters into your sorrows, he says: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered"!

There are many other wonderful promises of general import, showing that in the Kingdom of God under Christ which is even now being inaugurated, every human problem will be happily solved. We quote some of these:

Isaiah 35:1, 5, 8 to 10 "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. . . . And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those. The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. NO lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon. It shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Isaiah 65:21 and 22 "And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall

not plant, and another eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people; and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands."

Revelation 21:3 to 5 "And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."

Has this message from God's Word been a comfort and consolation to you? Is a friend, neighbor or relative also in need of such comfort: If so, pass this along to them, together with your personal testimony of the benefit you have received. In so doing you will be blessed, because you will be obeying the Apostle's admonition in 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

"Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning." Psalm 30:5

"The Lord healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Psalm 147:3

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Revelation 5:9

"And he that was dead came forth." John 11:44

" . . . the hour is coming in the which *all* that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth." John 5:28, 29

"Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done *in earth*, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10

"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited."
Isaiah 45:18

"Every word of God is pure." Proverbs 30:5

"The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; they break forth into singing." Isaiah 14:7