

BILL ANDERSON
MINISTRIES

**THE PASTOR'S
FUNERAL MANUAL**

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FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

While many of the messages are applicable to a wide variety of funeral occasions, some are more pertinent than others to specific settings.

The death of a baby	54, 72, 80
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PREFACE

I had been a pastor for all of two days when my first call came to conduct a funeral ceremony. I distinctly remember some of the emotions which came over me: (1) I wished I had had more time to prepare for the service, (2) I was hopeful that the Lord would give me that which to speak---healingly---to both believers and unbelievers, (3) I was in a state of semi-panic lest I should say something in the situation which would bring unnecessary hurt to those who were immersed in pain already, (4) I devoutly hoped that the funeral director would give me whatever direction he deemed advisable (translate that as “I didn’t have a clue”), (5) I wished that I had known the deceased, and her family, better, and (6) I wanted to give a creditable witness for the Lord in the presence of human extremity.

Interestingly, as I write these lines I am planning for a memorial service tomorrow, and, after almost half-a-century of ministry, I am possessed of many of those same sensations. The panic level is a bit lower, but, substantively, the situation is the same. After that first funeral service I said to the Funeral Director, “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this.” He replied that he had been at it for many years and had not himself ever become used to it and predicted the same for me. He was right.

From many perspectives, funeral services are the most memorable and momentous events in the life of the minister of the gospel. In the face of death, we all sit close to mortality, to finiteness, to the gossamer-thin line between time and eternity, and hear, often very clearly, as Wordsworth expressed it, “...the still, sad music of humanity.” Strangely, however, we also sit close to good things, to hints and adumbrations---“the brush of angels’ wings”---of the world to come and all its bright promises. Funeral services are conducted where the two worlds of time and eternity meet, and that mysterious juxtaposition wonderfully concentrates the faculties and calls forth our best.

The minister must not take any of that lightly. He must not glibly mouth platitudes which, while sometimes true, are often not, and in any case are incapable of serving to assuage the deep grief and profound trauma of those suffering the loss of a loved one. And he certainly must not become a religious functionary, trivializing a momentous occasion with offhandness and tedium. God’s man must intervene by light and love and he must do so in what he says, in what he does, and---most importantly---what he is. A literary critic said of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, following his now-famous speech to the west upon his release from prison, that he “was arresting because he spoke the truth as if it were true.” So must we. (#1)

Are funeral services really necessary? The experience of the race indicates that they serve obvious and undeniable needs: (1) The need to affirm life in the face of death, (2) The need to share with others life’s heaviest burdens, (3) The need to confront our finitenesses, to admit that death has actually occurred so we can deal with its reality, (4) The need to express hope in immortality, (5) The need for legitimate emotional expressions of fellow-feeling with those in trauma, (6) The need for ceremony marking the essential passages of life, and (7) The need to transcend the mundane and get in touch with our cosmic moorings.

THE FUNERAL AS SACRAMENT

Although all men seek significance, the universe conspires against success in that search. Illness and age and death destroy our carefully constructed facades of dignity and meaning. In man's battle with the universe, death is a triumphant shout on the part of the universe that it has won. Thus, the need for sacramentalization of life, not only in a generic sense, but for every individual life. Gilbert K. Chesterton has his detective Father Brown say, "All men matter. You matter. I matter. It is the hardest thing in theology to believe." (#2)

Funerals should say, and say with clarity and vigor, even if not in these precise words: "Our friend matters!" In that message is another: "If that is so, we---you and me---we matter, too!" Such an affirmation speaks to the heart-hunger of everyman---that we will not succumb to the dread fear that implacable and impersonal law govern life.

Henri Ouwen, in his book, *Creative Ministry*, has an insightful paragraph about these matters:

Neither medicine, nor psychology, neither psychiatry nor social work can ever respond to the final question of why man comes to life, slowly learns to stand on his own feet, attach himself to someone else, gives life to others and allows them to continue what he started but will not see fulfilled. A man who has not been able to give meaning to his own life cycle and accept it in its terminal reality cannot die as a man. (#3)

The funeral service, in the hands of a caring and skilled man of God, may well serve to point to answers, even for the "common" man who has never thought, consciously and carefully, of such profundities of the human experience, of such "final questions," to use Bonhoeffer's language. We are all philosophers with or without the knowledge of formal philosophical categories.

THE FUNERAL AS SEPARATION

Death, obviously, is a process of physical separation from the living. The stark open grave, the mound of dirt, the grave-attendants (often, with shovels in hand)---all that is a strong set of signals of formal separation, of closure, of finalizing normal relationships on earth. That need---because of the realities behind it---is a vital one and funerals serve us in that way. To put it another way: as strange as it may sound, in the death situation, humans are forced to accept the fact that death has actually occurred.

THE FUNERAL AS SHARING

Funerals also allow us to face, and grow through, challenging "passages" with significant others helping us through such transitions. Emile Durkheim, one of the earliest sociologists, has observed that the various rites, in all cultures, relating to birth, puberty, marriage, death, etc., do not, initially, speak to a need for transcendence in our lives, as is commonly supposed. Rather, he said, they speak to our need for community, for relationship. Funerals, in a graphic and vivid way, provide a means of expression for that fundamental human need.

I mentioned earlier that funerals serve the human need for ceremony or ritual. C. S. Lewis says about ritual:

Those who dislike ritual in general---ritual in any way and in every department of life---may be asked most earnestly to reconsider the question. It is a pattern imposed on the mere flux of our feelings by reason and will, which renders pleasures less fugitive and griefs more enduring, which hands over the power of wise custom the task (to which the individual and his moods are so inadequate) of being festive or sober, gay or reverent, when we choose to be, and not at the bidding of chance. (#4)

Above and beyond our like or dislike of ceremony, we may be sure that funerals will continue in some form, and that ministers---hopefully, along with others---will be called on to inform them with meaning.

Although I, at times, do not use formal outlines at funeral services, I present here several that I have used, in the hope that they will serve as “starters” or “prompters” or “facilitators” for such occasions. Certainly, I hope the outlines will not becloud the natural elevated mood or, as I believe, a divinely-produced spontaneity requisite for measuring up to the needs of the funeral occasion. Even the youngest among us, anyway, have already observed that no two funeral services are exactly alike, indeed, cannot be. That fact, along with many other essential characteristics of the funeral occasion, demands that we lead with judicious and prayerful care in the choosing of materials to be used on such occasions. Of course, all such materials must be personalized, made richer by the imprint of the life we have gathered to honor, and by our personal relationship to that life. In an interesting sense we do not choose materials; the occasion itself does so. (One recalls Lincoln’s unforgettable words in a funeral setting: “But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.”)

More often than not, very probably, only parts of these outlines will be used, and, as with all outlines, the material used must be subservient to the three key virtues of ancient (and good modern) public speaking: pathos (passion), ethos (identification with the auditors and their situation), and logos (the clear communication of a specific word which matches the situation).

It is my opinion, as to the length of funeral message, that much less than fifteen minutes is probably not wise, and much more than twenty is not either. Usually, by the time the formal funeral service arrives, the family is emotionally exhausted and needs to move on to healing and the resumption of life’s normal routine. On the other hand, the funeral is fraught with gravitas, and must not be trivialized by hurrying through it. Many matters---the role and status of the person in the community, the age of the deceased, the circumstances surrounding the death, even geography (!) etc., all play some role in determining the structure of the service.

As a caveat, all of us remember funeral ceremonies which, fittingly, lasted for hours. The “art” of funeral services must be given opportunity to overcome the “science” of the occasion. “Force” must be allowed to overcome “form.”

What is the place of the minister and his funeral ministrations?

There is no greater crisis that can come to a family than the loss of one of its loved ones through death. Historically man has always called upon whatever religious beliefs he possessed in the face of this mystery. Despite any effect secularism may have had upon the minister's role in our culture today, he remains the chief figure in our society charged with the responsibility of bringing comfort to the bereaved. (#5)

Left to doze in plastic armchairs
nodding in and out of woe
hearts prepared for termination
by a babbling TV show
dignity of fading people
thin anxiety in their walk
some will freeze whilst some will fall
into repetitious talk
Soon the functional undertaker
watches yet one more last kiss
the coffin's sealed as grief consumes
there must be more to death than this. (#6, italics mine)

Indeed! There is more to death than this, and the quintessential ministry of the pastor---in many and varied ways---is to give hope in the face of such hopelessness, perspective in the face of such puzzlement, significance in the face of such banality. We do, indeed, sorrow, as we must, but not as others which have no hope. (I Thessalonians 4:13)

Let him who questions the significance of the funeral read Garry Wills' book *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992). In that book the author argues that Lincoln's funeral message at Gettysburg, a mere 272 words or so (depending on which of the various texts one uses), dramatically changed America by putting the Declaration of Independence (it had called all men equal) above the Constitution (which had not mentioned slavery at all) as a "founding document." From that funeral sermon on, and because of that funeral sermon, America, says Wills, has been evolving toward the "equality" of the Declaration of Independence. The operative words of Lincoln on that occasion were about a new nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." That emphasis was not made, says Wills and others, in the Constitution, but was a pivotal contention of the Declaration of Independence. (Wills' essential argument may be seen on pages 145-147.)

For those interested in funeral orations, it is instructive to observe, too, that about 190 of the words of Lincoln's three-minute-or-so speech were monosyllables. Profundity need not be expressed polysyllabically!

Let every practitioner of funerals solemnly contemplate, and be sobered by, the following:

“One of the most provocative responses to the experience of death and the search for hope was presented by Professor Wilfred McClay of Tulane University after he had attended a funeral. I quote now his comments quite extensively because these words expose the twin edges of the question (of the search for hope) both for the antitheist and for the theist.

Where the rest of us had been stunned into reflective silence, awed and chastened by this reminder of the slender thread by which our lives hang, the minister had other things in mind....He did not try to comfort her family and friends. Nor did he challenge us to remember the hard words of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy will be done.' Instead, he smoothly launched into a well-oiled tirade against the misplaced priorities of our society, in which millions of dollars were being poured into 'Star Wars' research while young women such as this one were being allowed to die on the operating table. That was all this minister had to say. His eulogy was, in effect, a pitch for less federal spending on defense and more spending on the development of medical technology.... The only thing omitted was an injunction that we write our Congressman, or Ralph Nader, about this outrage.

I could hardly believe my ears....Leave aside the eulogy's unspeakable vulgarity and its unintentional cruelty to the woman's family. Leave aside the flabby and cliché quality of language and speech. Leave aside the self-satisfied tone of easy moral outrage.... Leave aside the fashionable opinions....

I am willing to concede, for the sake of argument, that the minister may have been right in everything he said. All of these considerations are beside the point. Nothing can alter the fact that he failed us, failed her, and failed his calling by squandering a precious moment for the sake of a second-rate stump speech, and by forcing us to hold our sorrow back in the privacy of our hearts, at the very moment it needed common expression. That moment can never be recovered.

Nothing that religion does is more important than equipping us to endure life's passages by helping us find meaning in pain and loss. With meaning, many things are bearable; but our eulogist did not know how to give it to us. All he had to offer was his political desiderata. For my own part, I left the funeral more shaken and unsteady than before. Part of my distress arose from frustration that any deepest thoughts (and those of many around me, as I later discovered) were so completely unechoed in this ceremony and in these words. But another part of my distress must have stemmed from a dark foreboding that I was witnessing another kind of malpractice, and another kind of death. (#7)

Indeed, "there must be more to death than this!"

ENDNOTES

1. "National Review," June 2, 2003, p. 25
2. *The Complete Father Brown*, G. K. Chesterton, Penguin Books, New York, 1986, p. 613
3. *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying*, Larry A. Platt and Roger G. Branch, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1988, p. 119
4. *Preface to Paradise Lost*, C. S. Lewis, Oxford University Press, London, 1942, p. 21
5. *Ibid.*, Platt and Branch, p.20
6. "You Don't Know What to Do When you Grow Old," Stewart Henderson, *Poetry for the Soul*, ed., Mary Batchelor, Moorings Publishing Company, Nashville, 1995, p. 439
7. *Can Man Live Without God*, Ravi Zacharias, Word Publishing, Dallas, Texas, 1994, pp. 46-47

FUNERAL SERMONS

THE GOD WHO IS NEAR

Romans 8

1. Psychologists indicate that the fear of being alone is the most devastating of all fears.
2. The two times, they say, in human experience when the fear of loneliness is most pronounced is at birth and at death.
 - 1) Loved ones are always present on those occasions, but interaction with them is extremely limited at best, non-existent at worst.
3. Is God near at death?
 - 1) Sir Robert Anderson's book, *The Silence of God*, speaks to the issue. Sometimes the heavens turn to brass and God is silent; He seems aloof and uncaring.
 - 2) Emile Zola in *La Beta Humaine* says that life on this planet may be compared to a train plunging at full speed through the night with a slain conductor in the cab. "The train is the world; we are the freight; fate is the tract; death is the darkness; God is the engineer--- who is dead." (James Leo Green in *God Reigns*, Broadman Publishing Co., Nashville, TN, nd, p. 147)
 - 3) In Thomas Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," we see an even worse scenario: Carlyle pictures a philosopher looking out over a city at midnight from his lofty attic, musing on the mingled joys and sorrows, the hopes and miseries of a half-million human beings huddled around him there. "But I," the philosopher exclaims at last, "I sit above it all; I am alone with the stars." Is that what God is like? If so, for many, God's death would be easier to deal with than His apathy. (*Heralds of God*, James Stewart, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1949, p. 127)
4. Romans 8 and the God who is near.

I. Vss 1-4 = GOD IS NEAR BECAUSE HE HAS FORGIVEN US

1. Sin separates us from God but there is no condemnation for those whose sins have been forgiven; we stand again in God's favor. The distance is diminished, indeed, non-existent.
2. God does not condemn the obedient Christian now, and He will not do so at death.

II. Vss 14-16 = GOD IS NEAR BECAUSE WE ARE IN HIS FAMILY

1. Children have an innate sense that they belong in a healthy family; that is true of our earthly family and our heavenly family as well.
2. The result is a natural awareness of a reciprocal love between parent and child; "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Romans 8:16

III. Vss 12, 17-25 = GOD IS NEAR BECAUSE OF THE FUTURE HE HAS PROMISED US

1. God has plans for His children! Death is the act by which we enter fully into that glorious future, therefore, no awakened Christian need fear it.

IV. Vss 35-39 = GOD IS NEAR BECAUSE OF OUR PRESENT FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM

1. Note v 35 with its seven problems and vss 38-39 with their ten profundities.

2. Note that the word “creature” in v 39 is actually “created thing” (ktisis); and the promise therefore is that nothing in all the entirety of the created order is a threat to our constant and continuing fellowship with the Father---WHETHER WE FEEL LIKE IT, SENSE IT, REALIZE IT, OR NOT!
3. “More than a conqueror” in v 37 is a single word, hupernikomen, which was coined by Paul here; it is never used in classical Greek nor in the Koine (the “common” Greek of the streets of Jesus’ day and of the New Testament).
4. Note that, paradoxically, we are killed (v36) and meet death (v38) but death does not separate us from God.
5. The point of the entire passage is that God’s love is constant through all the vicissitudes of life; nothing can separate us from it as expressed in and through Christ.
6. “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” (Isaiah 31:3) Everlasting is ---everlasting!

CONCLUSION

1. One of John Wesley’s last sentences was: “The best of all is, God is with us!” (The Journal of John Wesley, ed., P. L. Parker, Moody Press, Chicago, ND, p. 419)
2. A mother of a boy of six died. On the night following her memorial service, the boy was lying in bed with his father. After a time of silence, in the darkness, the boy asked his father quietly, “Daddy, is your face towards me?” The father replied that it was. After a bit, the father heard the long, measured breathing of a boy who had fallen into a deep and restful sleep. The Father’s face is towards us.

THE DISEASE OF MODERNITY: ALIENATION

Genesis 21:12-19

1. Our generation has been described as a generation of drifters.
2. We are cut off, cast adrift; aimlessness marks the lives of many.
3. Elton Trueblood characterized his generation as living in a “cut-flower” civilization; like cut-flowers, we appear to be alive, but we are cut off from our roots. Such rootlessness, he said, marks modern life.
4. A teenaged transient told me once, in a “Woodstock” jazz festival setting, when I asked her where she was going in life: “I’m not going anywhere; the trip’s the thing, man.”

I. THE DIMENSION OF ALIENATION

1. From professionals: John Naisbitt, in his Megatrends, said many believe nobody in the professions truly care for us as individuals. The physicians attach their cold machines to us, the bankers run us through their computers, the attorneys know us only as cases, etc.
2. From social relationships: they are marked by shallowness, transience, or pragmatism (“What can this relationship produce for my advancement?”)
3. From fellow-workers: management is at times leery of workers becoming too close to each other, and workers feel as if they are mere automatons.
4. From family members: families live close together physiologically but are not close emotionally; we have proximity without community; we are alone in the crowd. Families are highly mobile, with one in five American families moving every year.
5. From God: we experience cosmic alienation from God Himself. We once perceived of a personal God watching over us, but now we know only the vastnesses of interstellar space. We live (in Robert Ingersoll’s phrase) “between the barren peaks of two eternities.”

II. HAGAR’S ALIENATION

1. Poignantly expressed in v 16:
 - 1) Alienated from Sarah because she was a rival wife; v 10.
 - 2) Alienated from Abraham because he had wilfully dismissed her; v 14.
 - 3) Alienated from her own son Ishmael because, in desperation, she knew she could not provide for him; vs 16.
 - 4) Alienated, perhaps, even from God because He had told Abraham to send her away; v 12.

III. HAGAR’S DELIVERANCE

1. The Lord saw Ishmael and was moved by his plight; v 17.
2. The angel of the Lord saw Hagar’s plight and was moved by it; v 17.
3. God provided for both of them their immediate needs and stayed with (see text) Ishmael (v 20) and his mother.
4. God extended their family by giving Ishmael a wife (v 21) and healed their alienation.

CONCLUSION

1. Genesis 16:1-13

1) At Ishmael's birth, Hagar was cast out from Abraham and Sarah's house, but God found her---and stayed with her throughout the remainder of her life, as is reported by the text.

2) Hagar named the place where God found her Beer-la-hai-roi which means, "the well of him that lives and sees me!" Genesis 21 teaches us that every spot on earth is Beer-la-hai-roi!

2. A pastor's children were playing the childhood game "hide-and-seek." One of the children, a boy, hid under a door-step and felt sure that no one would find him. Upon reflection, he became fearful that, indeed, no one might ever find him! He stuck his foot out from under the door-step so his seeking sister could not miss him. We all of us want to be found. God has.

3. A question to ponder: how long did God watch Hagar before she realized He was watching?

THE FUTURE OF A TEAR

Psalm 56:8, Luke 6:21, Revelation 21:1-5

1. Tears are a common phenomenon of life; we enter life producing them and, often, we leave life producing them.
2. Many tears are seen in the Bible: David weeps over Absalom, Job says he could water his couch with his tears, Jeremiah has been called “the weeping prophet,” Paul says that he wrote to his Corinthian friends with many tears, etc.
3. Funerals call forth tears:
 - 1) Jesus wept at a funeral; John 11:35.
 - 2) Every funeral, before that one and after that one, has produced tears.
 - 3) The wise man says in Ecclesiastes, “Man goes to his long home and the mourners go about the streets.” (Ecclesiastes 12:5)
4. What is God’s response to tears?

I. GOD REMEMBERS TEARS

1. Psalm 56:8= “...put my tears in thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” The ancient custom was to catch tears in a bottle (called lachrymals), preserving them, as a token of true agony and sorrow.
2. God told Moses that He had heard the cries of His people in Egypt. (Exodus 3:7)
3. God told Hezekiah, “I have seen your tears.” (II Kings 20:5)

II. GOD REDEEMS TEARS

1. Luke 6:21= “Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh.”
2. A recent book, authored by Paul Billheimer, is entitled “Don’t Waste Your Sorrows.” How does one waste tears? If God does not redeem our tears, then they are truly and finally wasted.

III. GOD REMOVES TEARS

1. Revelation 21:5, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes...”
 - 1) God personally does it; He send no angels, pastors, deacons, etc.
 - 2) God patiently does it; no chiding, criticism, etc.
 - 3) God perfectly does it; He deals, as we do not and cannot, with the true causes of the tears. “For the former things are passed away.”
 - 4) God perpetually does it; His care lasts for eternity.
 - 5) God purposively does it, He does so in order that we might sing to the glory of God forever.

CONCLUSION

O beautiful for patriot dream,
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!

(From America, the Beautiful, Katherine Bates and Samuel Ward)

1. We will experience that perfectly only in heaven.
2. But, until then, “Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God.” (Paul Tillich)

ON DYING WELL

Genesis 50:22-25

1. We cannot prevent death, but we can respond redemptively to the necessity of dying.
2. We cannot decide whether or not to die, and, usually, we do not decide when and by what means we shall die.
3. We can, however, decide how we shall die; that is man's truest freedom.
4. Watching Joseph die is instructive in that regard.

I. DYING WELL DEMANDS THAT WE KNOW THE LORD OF DEATH

1. Joseph began early to respond personally to his heavenly Father, to develop a proper relationship with Him.

II. DYING WELL DEMANDS THAT WE HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO THE FATHER IN A FOREIGN LAND

1. Consider the vicissitudes of Joseph's life in Egypt, but from beginning to end, he was faithful to the Father and His plans.
2. Biblically, Egypt represents the world in rebellion against God; all of us live in spiritual "Egypt."

III. DYING WELL DEMANDS THAT WE KNOW OUR LIFE HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO OTHERS

1. Remember Joseph's scheme to save the lives of his family members.
2. Remember the blessing Joseph was to strangers in his adopted land.
3. Note the song, Make Me a Channel of Blessing.

IV. DYING WELL DEMANDS THAT WE HAVE CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE FUTURE

1. See vs 24-26="They will bury me but I will not stay buried."
2. Exodus 13:19=Along with the household belongings--furniture, jewelry, pots and pans, chickens, sheep and goats, Moses took the bones of Joseph when he left Egypt.
 - 1) Joshua 24: 32 ="And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem..."

CONCLUSION

1. That is the end of Joseph's story, but not the end of yours. See Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."
2. Joseph, along with all the Old Testament saints, will be raised up together with us at the resurrection of the righteous.
3. Balaam once prayed, "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Numbers 23:10), but such a prayer is futile unless one has lived the life of the righteous. Not all men die well, but all can.

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG

Psalm 23

1. One hundred and eighteen words comprise this song in the KJV. Some say it is the most beautiful song ever written.
2. Surely it is one of the most familiar, beloved by the entirety of Judaism and Christendom.
3. One hesitates to analyze it lest violence be done to its fragile beauty. Wordsworth spoke of the man who would "peep and botanize" on his mother's grave; we must be careful not to do so here. (Wordsworth's line is in *A Poet's Epitaph*.)
4. The song has supplied the mold into which many generations of God-fearing people have poured their loftiest---and loveliest---sentiments about God and His care for His own.
5. In contemplating the song, it is helpful to envision David, in later years and in retrospect, with the cares of a nation on his heart perhaps, reminiscing about how the sheep of his flock must have responded to his care for them.

I. Vss 1-3a=THE EXPERIENCE OF MAINTENANCE

1. David is my shepherd, I cannot therefore want for anything.
2. While grass is scarce, he finds pastures (plural) of it for me.
3. While water is often very difficult to find, he finds quiet pools of it for me. (Sheep are notoriously wary of drinking moving water.)

II. Vss 1-3a=THE EXPERIENCE OF GUIDANCE

1. Western shepherds drive their sheep; eastern ones lead them. In the west, they are called "cattle-drovers," not "cattle-leaders."
2. Our responsibility is to follow, not to lead!

III. Vs 4=THE EXPERIENCE OF DELIVERANCE

1. Why does not the believer fear death?
 - 1) From many perspectives, death is real; from an ultimate perspective it is but a shadow for God's children. No one fears the shadow of a gun, a knife, a hangman's noose.
 - 2) The believer walks through it, not simply into it. It is a transition, not a termination. It is a doorway, not a destination. Dr. Vance Havner, the well-known evangelist of yesterday, when his wife died, said he was walking through sorrow but was not wallowing in it.
 - 3) In any case, the believer has God's company in the journey. Note the number of personal pronouns.
 - 4) The believer will be protected and delivered by God; the rod (for protection) and the staff (for rescue) were two ends of the same instrument.

IV. Vs 5=THE EXPERIENCE OF SUSTENANCE

1. In the most demanding of situations, the believer experiences God's sustaining grace.

V. Vs 6=THE EXPERIENCE OF VIGILANCE

1. Two angels follow us, Goodness and Mercy.
2. They will follow us all through all the tortuous windings of life's journey, and then, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." All that and heaven, too!

CONCLUSION

1. Either you have no shepherd, you have the wrong shepherd, or you have the shepherd of Psalm 23.

WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE

Revelation 22:1-7

1. A Christian woman lost a niece of sixty-three years to death and said to me: “She was but a little past middle age.” The woman speaking to me was past her 90th birthday!

1) She then asked me, intently and quietly, “Pastor, what is heaven really like?”

2) It is striking that for over eighty years this woman had been traveling toward a destination, an eternal destination, but her focus had been more, apparently, on the road and not the reality, the process and not the place, the direction and not the destination.

3) It would be unthinkable to move to a certain place and not have asked of the Chamber of Commerce, friends, acquaintances, residents of the place, etc., for information about it.

2. What is the answer to her question? What is heaven really like?

1) All would confess that it is a place of perfection, whatever that word entails.

2) In Revelation 22:1-7 we may observe several of heaven’s perfections:

I. Vs 1=PERFECT ORNAMENTATION, i.e., beauty

1. George Santayana once said, “Beauty as we feel it is something indescribable: what it is or what it means can never be said.” (*Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, Thirteenth Edition, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1955, p. 806)

2. But it can be experienced! Heaven is total immersion in beauty, the grand perfection of every perfection.

II. Vs 2=PERFECT MEDICATION, i.e., “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Perhaps the most mellifluous line in the entire KJV Bible.)

1. Consider the obvious need for “the healing of the nations,” and the mind-boggling difficulty of delivering health care to any one of them today.

2. See Isaiah 1:4-9 for an unforgettable description of a sick nation; it is the diagnosis of the divine physician; Revelation 22:2 is His cure.

III. Vs 3=PERFECT RESTORATION, i.e., “and there was no more curse.”

1. At Christmas we sing:

No more let sins and sorrows grow;

Nor thorns infest the ground.

He comes to make His blessings flow,

Far as the curse is found,

Far as the curse is found.

IV. Vs 3=PERFECT ADMINISTRATION, i.e., “...the throne of God and the lamb shall be in it...”

1. The entire book of Revelation is about thrones of various sorts; the word is used thirteen times in chapter four alone.

2. Thrones always speak of authority to administrate.

3. No man nor group of men has ever produced a perfect administration anywhere on earth; try as we will, and try as we must, that can only occur in heaven.

V. Vs 3=PERFECT SUBORDINATION, i.e., "...his servants shall serve him..."

1. Heaven is a place, contrary to popular ideology, of intense activity.

1) See the memorable "L'Envoi" by Kipling, p. 107.

VI. Vs 4=PERFECT TRANSFORMATION, i.e., "...and they shall see his face."

1. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty..." (Isaiah 33:17);
contemplate the difference that fact will make!

2. Is there any connection between seeing Him and our personal transformation? Mysteriously, yes.

1) I John 3:1 has it this way: "...and it doth not yet appear what we shall be (we do not know some things), but this we know (we know some things with certainty) *that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

2) The Beautiful Vision transforms us.

VII. Vs 4=PERFECT IDENTIFICATION, i.e., "...and his name shall be in our foreheads."

1. The name identifies us; we are "branded."

2. Very probably, there is here, too, the idea of intimacy; He will know our name which, Biblically, speaks of intimacy.

VIII. Vs 5=PERFECT ILLUMINATION, i. e., "And there shall be no night there; neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light."

1. Consider the power of the sun; it will be a flicker compared to the radiance of God and of the Lamb. (Cf the Old Testament "shekinah" of God.)

2. All of earthly light, and thus, all earthly power, derives from the sun; heaven's light and power plant is the Triune God.

IX. Vs 6=PERFECT CORONATION, i.e., "and they shall reign forever and ever."

1. II Timothy 2:12="If we suffer we shall also reign with him."

X. Vs 6=PERFECT REVELATION, i.e., "...these words are true and faithful."

XI. Vs 7=PERFECT ANTICIPATION, i.e., "Behold, I come quickly."

Even so, Lord Jesus come!
Hope of all our hopes the sum,
Take thy waiting people home!
Long so long, the groaning earth,
Sighs for its redemption birth.

Therefore come, we daily pray;
Bring the resurrection-day;
Wipe creation's curse away.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Psalm 23

1. In I Kings 20:28 we read, “The Syrians have said, the LORD is God of the hills, but he is not a God of the valleys.”

1)The Syrians had been defeated in the hills and now challenge Israel to a battle in the valley because they believed Yahweh was strong only in the hills.

2)It is a common modern conception.

(1) How does our God perform in the valleys of life?

(2) There are the hills of youth, energy, ability, power, success, material blessing, opportunity, etc.

(3) But there are also the valleys, the valleys of age, illness, loneliness, injustice, fear, and, ultimately, death.

2. About the valleys:

I. THEY ARE A FACT OF LIFE

1. Even the planets and the ocean floor have them.

2. And every life experiences them.

II. THEY ADD TO THE VARIETY OF LIFE

1. Imagine the killing monotony of living on an endless and even table of concrete.

2. Our joys and laughter have their counterparts without which life would have little variety or flavor.

III. VALLEYS ARE OFTEN PLACES OF REFRESHMENT, MARKED BY WATER AND SHADE, ETC.

IV. VALLEYS ARE ALWAYS MORE FERTILE THAN HIGHLANDS

1. See the Valley of Eschol, Numbers 32:9

V. IN FACT, HIGHLANDS CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT VALLEYS.

1. The one presupposes the other.

VI. VALLEYS ARE NOT ALWAYS THE BEST PLACES TO LIVE, AND WE NEED NOT IF WE DON'T WISH TO

1. Contemplate the numbers and names of notables who spent time in various valleys, but did not choose to take up permanent residence there.

VII. NO ENERGY IS REQUIRED TO GET INTO A VALLEY, BUT, OFTEN, IMMENSE ENERGY IS REQUIRED TO GET OUT

1. Many choose to stay there only because it is easy to do so.

2. They miss, however, sunrises, sunsets, other lands, a perspective on the entire landscape of their lives,

including other valleys.

3. God promises to help us IN the valley and OUT of the valley.

CONCLUSION

1. God's promised victory, and gave it, in the valley in I Kings 20:28-29, "Because the Syrians have said, 'the LORD IS God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined, and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.'"

2. If we know that possibility, it allows us to experience the truth of II Chronicles 20:26 where "...they assembled themselves in the valley of Beracah; for there they blessed the Lord" for the victory.

3. And remember: according to the Song of Solomon 2:1, Jesus is the Lily of the Valley!

4. Vance Havner, the well-known evangelist of another day, upon the death of his beloved Sarah, said he was walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but was not wallowing in it.

DEATH PERSPECTIVES

Romans 14:7-13

1. What happens to us is not important; the way we respond to what happens to us is the critical thing.
 - 1) Failure, loss, set-back, illness, the death of a friend, etc., may depress one and yet deepen another. An anonymous poet wrote:

Two men behind prison bars stood;
One saw stars, the other saw mud.

2. How shall we perceive death?

I. Vss 7-8=THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

1. We are not in isolation down here with no one looking on, even though sometimes we feel that way.
 - 1) Sir Robert Anderson wrote a book, *The Silence of God*, in which he speaks of such a feeling of isolation.
 - 2) Thomas Carlyle has a line in his *Sartor Resartus*: “The bewildered wanderer stands, as so many have done, shouting question after question into the Sibyl-cave of Destiny, and receives no Answer but the Echo (of his own voice).” (*Sartor Resartus*, Odyssey Press, New York, 1937, p. 161)
 - 3) Robert G. Ingersoll, the notable agnostic, said, in a eulogy of his brother, “Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry.” (*Complete Lectures of Col. R. G. Ingersoll*, Regan Publishing Corp., Chicago, 1926, p. 60)
2. But here we read, “For none of lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto (literally, towards) the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto (literally, towards) the Lord...”
 - 1) See “Careless seems the great avenger...” (*The Present Crisis*, by James Russell Lowell; see p. 111)
 - 2) Jean Paul Sartre (the French existentialist atheist) expressed great distaste at the idea of a cosmic eye keeping surveillance on him. What was a curse to him is a blessing to Christians.

II. Vs 8=THE PROPERTY OF THE LORD

1. Identity always speaks of ownership; tell me whose you are and I will tell you who you are.
 - 1) First, we are the Lord’s; what wonderful ramifications!
 - 2) Second, death does not change that fact; what further wonderful ramifications!
 - (1) The believer will be no more His when he arrives in heaven than he is now.

III. Vs 9=THE POWER OF THE LORD

1. Who is the boss of this universe? Is anybody but Jesus qualified to assume that position?
2. Note His qualifications: He both “died, and rose, and revived,” (The Greek says simply that he *apethanen kai eksesen*, i.e., died and lived again.)
 - 1) The Frenchman (and Christian) statesman Tallyrand was told by an acquaintance that he was con-

sidering creating a new religion. Tallyrand suggested that, in order to make an immediate impact, he should begin by dying and rising again.

IV. Vss 10-12=THE PROPHECY OF THE LORD (In fact, there are four prophecies here.)

1. We shall all stand; nobody is exempt.
2. Every knee shall bow; some will be glad, some sad.
 - 1) See Philippians 2:9-11.
3. Every tongue shall confess (what?).
4. Every one of us shall give an account (*logos*).
 - 1) An accounting term; cp a ledger sheet, account book, auditing process.

V. Vss 13f=THE PRIORITY OF THE LORD (a word to survivors)

1. Note our proclivity to judge others; the entire section deals with that tendency.
2. Our biggest business, however, is not to put a stumbling block before others.
 - 1) V 19="Let us therefore follow after (pursue) those things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another."
 - 2) The first part is vertical; the second part is horizontal.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF DEATH

Revelation 14:13

1. Very few people would ever called death blessed; in fact, birth, not death, is referred to, universally, as “the blessed event.”
2. Our lives, and literature, are full of expressions of the fear, even revulsion, of death; it is the final negation of life itself.
 - 1) A psychiatrist says, “The fear of death is present in all our mental functioning at all times.”
 - 2) Another psychiatrist says, “Every fear we have is ultimately the fear of death.”
 - 3) An English psychologist, Melanie Klein, says that death is at the root of all human anxiety.
 - 4) The theologian Paul Tillich wrote, “All anxiety is based on the fact that man knows that he is finite, that he has to die.”
 - 5) The Bible refers to all men as being in bondage all their lives to the fear of death. (Hebrews 2:15)
3. But the Bible also characterizes death as “blessed.”
4. On seven occasions in the book of Revelation, the word “blessed” is used, and on all seven occasions the blessedness has at least a tangential relationship with death. (“Blessed” is *makarios*, enviable, worthy of imitation, etc.)

I. Revelation 1:3= “Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

1. The book deals with the end-time events of human history which, necessarily, deal with the death of all human beings, therefore in view of the impending end, “blessed” is he who reads, hears, and obeys the commandments of God.

II. Revelation 14:13= “I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.”

1. “Labors” are drudgeries, severe toils, etc.
2. The promise here gives evidence that God has not forgotten our works.
3. Much of the blessing of life resides in the knowledge that our good deeds will follow us to heaven.

III. Revelation 16:15= “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”

1. Remember the wedding parable of Jesus, and the improperly dressed man.
2. Note the “put off-put on” language of Paul in Colossians 3.
3. Consider the public humiliation if one is not dressed properly at the Messianic Banquet to come.

IV. Revelation 19:9= “And he saith to me, blessed are they that are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”

1. Note the emphasis, throughout Jewish and Christian theology, of the coming Messianic Banquet at the

end of history.

2. Note that it is an inestimable blessing simply to be invited. This speaks of the immense importance of the ministry of evangelism.
3. Note the obvious fact that all are not called to the banquet; there is here no doctrine of universalism, that is, that all will one day be saved.

V. Revelation 20:6="Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall reign with him a thousand years."

1. Two resurrections are referenced here, and two deaths.
2. What is the second death? See Revelation 20:13-16.

VI. Revelation 22:1-7=see especially v 7.

VII. Revelation 22:14= "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city.

1. The Greek is "blessed are the ones who are washing their robes."
2. "Right" is *eksousia*, i.e., power or authority.
 - 1) By what right is a human allowed to enter heaven?

CONCLUSION

1. Revelation 14:13=The blessing is to those who die "IN THE LORD;" not in the church, in the denomination, in the choir, in the pew, in the pulpit, in favor with the pastor, etc., but in the Lord.

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD

Revelation 14:13

1. The 12th chapter of Revelation delineates the activity of the devil on earth during the three-and-one-half years of the period which the Bible designates as “the great tribulation.”

1) Note references during that period to the “overcomers” and the threefold means by which they overcome (Revelation 12:11).

2. The 13th chapter of Revelation describes the careers of the two beasts, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth.

3. The 14th chapter of Revelation speaks of the 144,000 faithful followers of Christ who do not receive the “mark of the beast;” they possess, not the name of the beast, but that of the Father God in their foreheads.

4. In all this period, countless martyrs will give their lives for the faith.

5. Is all lost for them? Does their faithfulness go unrewarded?

1) Many, having gone through some such period of trouble, think so. Their fear is “God has forgotten, if He ever knew!”

2) But God’s answer to their fears is found in Revelation 14:13.

I. A WORTHY PRIVILEGE

1. God pronounces them “blessed,” i.e., worthy of imitation, commendable, praiseworthy, to be lauded, etc.

2. The label “blessed” will be attached to the faithful---forever!

1) See Hebrews 6:10=“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

II. A WANTED PEACE

1. “Tribulation” is *thlipsis*, i.e., a squeezing, a pressurized situation. (The English word “tribulation” actually comes directly the Latin word *tribulum*, a heavy sled-like threshing device which was customarily dragged over the grain in order to separate the chaff from the kernels of grain.)

2. See the US submarine, the “Thresher,” which was lost on April 10, 1963 in the North Atlantic. The submarine, which had cost over forty-five million dollars to build, was crushed by the sea-water because the pressurization system failed. *The pressure on the outside was far greater than the resisting pressure on the inside.* The submarine imploded and killed all 129 who were in it.

3. History is replete with biographies of “squeezed” saints!

4. Here, “they rest from their labors,” the squeezing of tribulational pressures. Peace is finally theirs.

III. A WAITING PAY-OFF

1. “And their works do follow them.”

2. Jesus explicitly promises a reward, even for a simple cup of cold water in His name (Matthew 10:42) and indicated that no good work will go unrewarded. That is the consistent message of the Bible.

3. See Hebrews 10:35, “Do not cast away your confidence, which has, not reward, but *great* reward.” Who can imagine the greatness of the reward for faithful service to the Saviour!

CONCLUSION

1. For those who remain: “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)
2. See also Acts 14:22: “...and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”
3. But, according to the song, “It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.”
4. And finally this: “...our light affliction (again *thlipsis*), which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (II Corinthians 4:17-18)

FEAR'S FUNERAL

I Peter 1:3-9

1. The fear of death is a universal phenomenon; it affects every human being on the globe, to one extent or the other.
2. Sometimes that fear is not as intense as at other times, but it can be debilitating; a true terror.
 - 1) Hebrews 2:15 states the obvious, that is, that the fear of death is universal and holds us all in its bonds---all our lives!
 - 2) Melanie Klein, an English psychologist, stated that the fear of death is at the root of all human anxiety.
3. Precisely what does our fear of death entail?
 - 1) That we will lose time, life's most precious commodity
 - 2) That we will be severed from all meaningful relationships
 - 3) That the condition is irreversible
 - 4) That we move into the unknown
 - 5) That we will lose the capacity of thought
 - 6) That we will lose all sense of pleasure
 - 7) That we will lose the most precious commodity on earth, life itself
4. If death is truly the end, one need not worry because, in any case, he would have no consciousness of any loss of any kind. (That is the best the worldling can hope for.)
5. How does the Christian overcome those fears?
 - 1) By the knowledge that we lose time, but gain eternity. (See John 10:28, I Thessalonians 5:10)
 - 2) By the knowledge that, while we will, indeed, be severed from some earthly relationships, we will enjoy---forever---heavenly ones, unimaginable in their delight. (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:10). And that is not to mention the corollary: we will renew relationships when many of those we leave behind follow us to heaven.
 - 3) By the knowledge that the condition is indeed irreversible, for which we shall be eternally grateful. (John 10: 28-29; "When we've been there for ten thousand years.....")
 - 4) By the knowledge that we now live in the unknown but will live in the known upon death and entry into God's presence. (I Corinthians 2:9-10)
 - 5) By the knowledge that, far from losing the capacity for thought, it will be immeasurably enhanced there. (I Corinthians 13:12)
 - 6) By the knowledge that we have known no ultimate pleasure down here; that is reserved for heaven. (Matthew 25:21,23; "Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God," Paul Tillich. The familiar song mentions a condition "where rivers of delight shall ever flow...")
 - 7) By the knowledge that what we call life down here is but life in some embryonic state; it is incipient life, partial and limited life, and anticipatory of a richer, fuller life there. (Jesus' promise of the more abundant life in John 10:10b is certainly not limited to life on earth.)

An ancient Roman epigram has it: "Who knows but those who live in the other world say this is the land of death and that is the land of life." Which is precisely what the Bible teaches.

CONCLUSION

1. Shakespeare speaks of the dread of death (a common theme in his writings), when he writes:

But that dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn (bounds)
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?

(Hamlet, Act III, Sc 1)

2. But somebody has returned! And because He has, as
an anonymous author has said:

The flood of death has lost its chill
Since Jesus crossed the river.

3. That's why our author says, "Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (I Peter 1:3; "lively" means living, energizing, empowering.)

FINISHING THE JOB

John 9:1-4

1. Most of us feel, at times if not persistently, that we do not have enough time to do all we need to do in life. We need ten days of 36 hours each a week.
2. In fact, every man has enough time to do whatever God has ordained that he should accomplish.

I. JESUS WAS A BUSY MAN

1. That is indicated by the words “passed by.” Jesus was always on the move, always about His Father’s business.
2. “The zeal of thine house hath consumed me.” (Psalm 69:1, John 2:17)

II. JESUS WAS A BUSY MAN HELPING PEOPLE

1. Here He helps in two situations: (a) advocating proper theology, and (b) healing a blind man.
2. A perfect illustration of the mercy, compassion, and power of Jesus’ life---and its perfect balance.

III. JESUS WAS A BUSY MAN HELPING PEOPLE BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT WAS THE WORK GOD HAD ASSIGNED HIM.

1. If God were in the flesh, those are the very things He Himself would be doing. (Which is, in fact, the case here: Jesus is God in the flesh.)
 - 1) A man, still looking for the appearance of the promised Messiah, was asked by a Christian, “How would a future Messiah improve on what Jesus did and said?” The man’s response: “I’ve never thought through that.” It remains an arresting question.
 - 2) Jesus, according to Acts 10:38, went about doing good; the supreme understatement.
 - 3) And so should we. A minister was visiting a mission station in Africa. He was to arrive by plane. The driver, never having seen the minister, asked how he might recognize him. He was told: “He’ll be a tall man helping somebody.”

IV. JESUS WAS A BUSY MAN HELPING PEOPLE BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT GOD’S ASSIGNMENT FOR HIM AND HE KNEW, FURTHER, THAT HIS TIME TO ACCOMPLISH THAT ASSIGNMENT WAS SHORT.

1. Vs 4= “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is yet day; the night cometh, when no man can work.”
2. One cannot see the night coming, feel the night coming, hear the night coming, but it comes. (The Greek verb is in the present tense; the night is *now approaching!*)
3. But, one says: “We will just turn the lights on.”
 - 1) The marvelous invention of the incandescent light bulb has dissipated the darkness, but only temporarily so. No technology has, or ever will, conquer the darkness of death, of which Jesus speaks here. The day will be over, work done or undone.
 - 2) The author once conducted a funeral service for an elderly woman he had never met, a nephew of whom having requested his services. The nephew had demanded that the Funeral Director place

a battery-powered light, with the light switch on, in the coffin of his aunt because she had an almost pathological fear of the darkness. Obviously, no battery ever devised is sufficiently powerful to prevent the darkness of death from coming.

CONCLUSION

1. Jesus later referred to these same truths, and added a confession that no other man can make in any full sense: “I have glorified thee on the earth; *I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*” (John 17:4, emphasis mine.)
2. And then there is His last sentence while on the cross, recorded in John 19:30, “It is finished,” meaning, all that God had assigned Him, He had completed.
3. On his deathbed, the author’s father-in-law asked me, “How is the work going?” And then this, his last sentence to me during his life: “You better get busy with it; a man doesn’t have much time to do his job.”

DOES IT ALL WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD?

Romans 8:29-31

1. This text is the Biblical Matterhorn for all sufferers.
2. It is, also, perhaps the text most difficult to believe in crisis situations.
3. Seven misinterpretations:
 - 1) All things will work together for financial blessing.
 - 2) All things will work together for physical blessing.
 - 3) God promises to make the entire experience pleasant.
 - 4) God promises that His children will always understand the entire process.
 - 5) Everything that happens to a Christian is automatically God's ultimate and ideal will.
 - 6) The good that God promises will appear immediately.
 - 7) This promise is for everybody, Christian and non-Christian alike.
4. A simple, but accurate, interpretation is: "Ultimately God causes everything that happens to His children who love Him to make them more like His Son Jesus."

I. ULTIMATELY

1. The famed infidel Robert Ingersoll often made a speech in which he dared God, if He existed, to kill him in the next five minutes. Then he was accustomed to dramatically take out his pocket watch and stare at it for five minutes, waiting before his stunned audience for God to act upon his dare.
 - 1) The great preacher Joseph Parker, commenting on Ingersoll's dare, said that Ingersoll did not know much about God if he thought he could exhaust His patience in five minutes.
2. God is not accustomed to allowing either His friends or His enemies to dictate His calendar.
 - 1) The text affirms, however, the consistent witness of the Bible that, ultimately, God will bring all things to accord with His perfect purpose.
 - 2) See Dr. Robert G. Lee's famous sermon, "Payday Someday."

II. GOD PERSONALLY CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK OUT FOR GOOD FOR HIS CHILDREN

1. The KJV reads as if some mechanistic law operates to produce the end result promised, but the subject of the verb is God Himself, i.e., God Himself personally causes good to come to His children.
2. We are, therefore, in the personal hands of our heavenly Father, and not in the iron grip of impersonal and implacable law.

III. NOTE THE PHRASE, "TO HIS CHILDREN"

1. The promise here, clearly, is to those who are His.
2. The text says, "...to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (See vs 35f)

IV. TO MAKE US MORE LIKE JESUS

1. Jesus is the first-born among many brethren, and God's intention in all that happens to His children is to

conform us to His image, to be like Him.

1) A good parent, teacher, coach does not hesitate to inflict pain on their charges if that pain produces character. *They will not leave those under their tutelage temporarily happy and permanently sad.*

2) “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peacable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised by it.” (Hebrews 12:11)

3) Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified.

(From the hymn *In The Cross of Christ I Glory*, emphasis added; all things, “good” and “bad” must be sanctified by the cross.)

4) In the end, we will all praise God for redeeming our experiences, pleasant and painful, and using such experiences to make us more like His blessed Son.

CONCLUSION

1. In Genesis 42:36, having suffered excruciatingly, and that for many years, aged Jacob cried out, “All these things are against me.” In fact, as subsequent events showed, the exact opposite was true.

2. R. A. Torrey once characterized this passage as being “a soft pillow for tired hearts.”

THE FUTURE OF A FAITHFUL MAN

Psalm 16

1. Psalm 16:1="Preserve me, O God..."
 - 1) The common cry of humanity: "Make me permanent", "Don't allow me to become a nothing and a nobody," "Rescue me from the impending oblivion!"
 - 2) See Psalm 90:17, "...establish thou the work of my hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."
 - 3) Modern man's great fear is that he will, at death, descend into nothingness, disappear into the abyss; that somebody will, advertently or inadvertently, push the "Global Delete" button on his life-computer.
2. Listen to his strong confession in v 1: "*In thee do I put my trust.*"
3. In the following verses (through verse 8) he writes of the contrast of saints and sinners, and then of God being his "portion." What a portion!
 - 1) Vs 6 is powerful: "I like the territory you have assigned to me."
4. Verses 9-10=THE FUTURE OF A FAITHFUL MAN

I. Vss 9-10=DELIVERANCE

1. "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh shall also rest in hope," etc.
 - 1) Note the clear-cut confession of belief in the resurrection in the Old Testament.
 - 2) Quoted of Jesus (Acts 2:26-27), but it is also true of all believers.
 - 3) See promises of resurrection of all believers in the New Testament in I Corinthians 15, I Thessalonians 4:13, etc.

II. Vs 1=DIRECTION

1. "Thou wilt show me the path of life..."; no greater promise in the entire than this is ever given in the entire Bible.
2. See Psalm 23: "...the paths of righteousness..."
3. See also Jesus' word about the "narrow way" which leads to life. (Matthew 7:13-14)
4. See Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go; I (note the personal pronoun) will guide thee with mine eye."
5. See William Cullen Bryant's *To a Waterfowl*, p. 116.
6. Contrast the wicked: they are led, not to life, but to death.

III. Vs 11=DELIGHT

1. "In thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures evermore."
2. Not only delight, but "*fulness of joy.*"
 - 1) See John 10:10b, "...I am come that they might have life, and that might have it more abundantly."
3. Three great words in v 11: life, joy, pleasures; the three great pursuits of every life.

4. Note the eternality of it all: “evermore.” “Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God.” (Paul Tillich)
 - 1) Imagine it being said of an inhabitant in heaven, “Well, he was once happy here, but his joy faded.”

CONCLUSION

1. Note the present tenses of the last sentence of the text, vs 11b.
2. Those realities belong to all believers, whether in heaven or on earth.

TIME AND ETERNITY

Psalm 90

1. Every event of life is instructive; events educate.
 - 1) "One impulse from a vernal wood may teach you more of man, of moral evil and of good, than all the sages can." (Wm Wordsworth)
 - 2) "...we daily Sinais climb and know it not." (Wm Wordsworth)
2. Death is an austere teacher; when she takes the lecturn, she has our undivided attention.
3. What are her lessons according to Psalm 90?

I. Vss 1-2=THE ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD

1. See vss 1-2; God exists from eternity past through eternity future; an imponderable fact, but true.

II. Vss 3-11=THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF MAN

1. If God is eternal, we are not; if His life is unlimited throughout eternity, ours is limited to time; ours is finite, His infinite.
2. Note the seven specific allusions to the temporal nature of man's life:
 - 1) vs 4=our life is like yesterday when it is past; in retrospect, time seems to have passed quickly, but at the moment, it appears to drag.
 - 2) vs 4=our life is like a watch in the night; but a brief time---such as the military sentinel's watch, which seems very long while it is occurring.
 - 3) vs 5= our life is like a flood; in the East, a dry wadi, or creek-bed, which for the most of the year is dry but, sometimes very suddenly, becomes filled with run-off from a flood.
 - 4) vs 5=our life is like a night's sleep; it lasted for six or eight hours, but, again, seems much briefer than that in retrospect.
 - 5) vss 5-6=our life is like the grass in the field which, while green today, so soon loses its life.
 - 6) vs 9=our life is like a tale that is told; like a brief story a grandfather tells his grandchild at bed-time, the story-time is over quickly.
 - 7) vs 10=our life is like the flight of a bird; now we see it and, presently, we do not.

III. Vs 12f=THE PROPER RESPONSE, PRAYER, BUT PRAYER FOR WHAT?

1. Vs 12=FOR REASON, i.e., teach us to number our days
2. Vs 13=FOR REDEMPTION, i.e., have mercy on me
3. Vss 14-15=FOR RESTORATION; the Jerusalem Bible has "...make our future as happy as our past was sad..."
4. Vs 16=FOR REVELATION
5. Vs 17=FOR ROOTEDNESS
 - 1) The final prayer is, really, "make me last forever;" "don't let me cease to exist."
 - 2) Psychologists suggest that all men seek immortality in one way or the other. Such a desire is manifested, some say, by amassing possessions, creating businesses, having buildings named after us, producing

art of one sort or another, even bearing children. An article appeared in the periodical "Smithsonian" which labeled the construction of the incomparable Egyptian pyramids, and the production of their glorious artwork, as "The Quest for Immortality." ("Smithsonian," July, 2003, pp. 50f)

3) The prayer here, at bottom, is: "Let me give myself to something that is ultimately important, that is weighty, that outlives me, when all the monuments of mankind and their adornments are gone." The true Christian has done that by serving his God.

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

Job 14:1-14

1. Job's great question was (and is): "If a man die, shall he live again?"
2. Wordsworth has his great poem, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality."
 - 1) That poem emphasizes an "immortality" of the past; what of the future? It looks at eternity past; what about eternity future?
 - 2) Some evidences of a future immortality:

I. WE KNOW THAT CERTAIN APPEARANCES DECEIVE US

1. A bird flies away from us, but another reports that the same bird, in the same flight, moves toward him. Both are telling the truth, although they speak from differing perspectives.
2. Analogously, death appears to be the end, but it may well not be.

II. TERRIBLE INJUSTICES PREVAIL IF THERE IS NO IMMORTALITY

1. Ecclesiastes 10:7 speaks of such injustices: "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking like servants upon the earth."
 - 1) If there is no place of righting injustices, then, as Shakespeare said about life, it is "...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (*Macbeth*, Act V, Sc 3, 11f)

III. A WIDESPREAD BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY EXISTS

1. Sir James Fraser's monumental work, *The Golden Bough*, which describes religious views of primitive peoples, is a well-documented account indicating that all cultures believe in the life hereafter.
2. The Bible says that God has set eternity in our hearts. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

IV. A DESPERATE HUNGER FOR IMMORTALITY EXISTS

1. That does not make the doctrine true, but, many say, our very hunger demonstrates the fact that God has provided food to satisfy such a hunger, namely, eternity itself.
2. T. H. Huxley, the famous agnostic, once said, "The older I get, the less I like the idea of extinction."

V. A UNIVERSAL DESIRE EXISTS TO CONTINUE RELATIONSHIPS BEYOND THIS LIFE

1. Again, that fact does not establish immortality, but it a witness to man's acknowledgement of it, and his desire for it.
2. Man is a gregarious creature by nature; we desire comaraderie, both in this life and in the anticipated one to come; see C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.
3. John Milton said that to be alone would be hell; he himself, he said, was hell: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am hell." (*Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 1 75)

VI. A STRONG DESIRE EXISTS TO BE FREE FROM THE LIMITATIONS OF EARTHLY BONDAGES

1. Immanuel Kant argued that one of the evidences that eternity must exist is that we are so limited here, and God would not have given us the passionate desire to be free and then deny the possibility of it occurring.
2. Every promise of the Bible relating to eternal life is, by definition, a confession of man expanding, in one way or the other, his earthly existence.

VII. THE WITNESS OF GREAT MINDS INDICATES A PERVASIVE BELIEF IN IT.

1. See pages 148f for quotes on immortality.
2. The witness of the greatest Mind: See II Timothy 1:10, which says that the grace of God "...is not made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." That sentence is magnificently full of incomprehensible implications.
3. The context (II Timothy 1:8-10) says:
 - 1) God has saved us
 - 2) God has summoned us
 - 3) God has shown up
 - 4) God has slain death, and
 - 5) God has shined on a dark thing (He has "brought immortality to light.")
4. Your positive immortality depends on what you do with the gospel, i.e., the good news that Jesus died for you.

THE FAITH OF AN AGING SAINT

Psalm 77: 1-20

1. Aging is almost universally hated, but it has its compensations.
2. A huge plus: we're getting closer to heaven.
3. Some have said we're not:

I remember, I remember
The fir-tree dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Then when I was a boy.

From *I Remember, I Remember* by Thomas Hood

- 1) See Wordsworth's "Intimations on Immortality."
- 2) But, if we choose, we can move nearer to heaven as we age:

Before thy mustic altar, heavenly truth,
I kneel in manhood as I knelt in youth.
Thus let me kneel, till this dull form decay
And life's last shade be brightened by thy ray.

Sir William James

3. Psalm 77 refers to the spiritual growth of faith in the aging saint.

I. Vss 1-2=THE AGING SAINT KNOWS THAT GOD HEARS HIS PRAYER

II. Vss 3-9=THE AGING SAINT KNOWS HE WANTS, NOT SIMPLY TO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE, BUT TO HAVE GOD ACT

1. Note the six questions:
 - 1) Will the Lord cast off forever?
 - 2) And will he be favorable no more?
 - 3) Is this hIs mercy clean gone forever?
 - 4) Doth his promise fail for evermore?
 - 5) Hath God forgotten to be gracious?

6) Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

(1) An ancient theory has it that six is the number, in the Bible, of man; the six questions are quintessentially human.

III. Vss 10-20=THE AGING SAINT KNOWS THAT GOD HAS ACTED ON HIS BEHALF BEFORE

1. Note the catalogue of blessings recorded.

IV. Vss 13-14a=THE AGING SAINT KNOWS GOD’S NATURE HAS NOT CHANGED

V. Vss 19-20=THE AGING SAINT KNOWS THAT, THOUGH, IN PERHAPS A MYSTERIOUS WAY, GOD WILL LEAD HIM TODAY.

1. “Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”

2. Are God’s footprints yet visible in the Red Sea? He led, but nobody can see precisely where He did it. The knowledge of God’s leadership belongs to all believers; the knowledge of the precise way and place in which He led is not.

3. As Moses and Aaron were forced to walk by faith, so are we. But the aging saint is satisfied to follow, knowing God will lead, however mysteriously, in heaven as well as on earth.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

.....
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

From “Light Shining Out of Darkness: by Wm Cowper

A MINUTE PRAYER AND A MASSIVE ANSWER

Luke 23:33-42

1. The song, *Beyond the Sunset* speaks of the conditions of life after death for the believer.
2. Tens of thousands of other songs do the same.
3. What is beyond the sunset? According to our text:

I. IMPLICATION, i.e., you will live somewhere after this life

1. Neither the thief's request, nor Jesus' promise to him, has any meaning whatever if life does not exist after death.
2. If the man's hopes for such a life were unfounded, we may be sure Jesus would have corrected the misperception.

II. INTEGRITY, i.e., Jesus used the word "verily," meaning, "truthfully," "without question," etc.

1. The word speaks of the fulness of authority, and integrity, which are resident in Christ.

III. INTIMACY, i.e., "you will be with me..."

1. That intimacy speaks of God's ultimate design in creating man in the first place: man is created to enjoy fellowship God; that is mankind's highest calling and privilege.
2. That is precisely why God re-creates a man, saves a man, i.e., to restore the fellowship broken by our sin.
 - 1) See Revelation 3:20, "...and he will sup with me, and I with him," that is, we will have fellowship together.
 - 2) See Psalm 23, "...*thou* shalt be with me..."
 - 3) See John 14:3, "...I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also."

IV. IMMEDIACY, i.e., "...today, shalt thou be with me in paradise..."

1. That statement answers many puzzling questions about the after-life.
2. II Corinthians 5:8, therefore, says, "...we are willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

V. INTRIGUE, i.e., "paradise"

1. A word borrowed from the Persian language; it refers to a garden.
2. I Corinthians 2:9, "...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

VI. INSIGHT, i.e., the thief is possessed, instantly, and contrary to his consistent lifestyle, of sufficient wisdom to recognize Jesus' royalty, and to confess the same. He saw his own sin and Jesus' sovereignty.

1. Christ did not, on the surface of things, appear either to be sinless or sovereign, in fact, far from it! He

was, in fact, both, and the eye of faith on the part of the thief discerned it.

VII. INVITATION, i.e., “...Lord, remember me when you comest into thy kingdom.”

1. A minute prayer and a massive result!
2. If you have not uttered that prayer, do so now.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS' SHEEP

John 10:1-5, 7-11, 15-18

1. The Bible has many analogies expressive of our relationship to Jesus; one of the most loved is that of our being His sheep.

1) Over 300 references exist in the Bible to the shepherding task; scores of them illustrate the relationship of God to His people.

2. Note the implications of such a relationship here:

I. Vs 27=THEY ARE MINE

1. Compare a brand on cattle; brands are marks of identification.

2. Personal, possessive pronouns, as here, are often used of that relationship.

II. Vss 5,14=THEY HEAR MY VOICE

1. Note the present tense; they hear my voice now.

2. Sheep are notoriously adept at being able to distinguish voices.

1) A traveler to the mideast tells of two flocks of sheep entering a cave during a rainstorm. When the storm was over, one shepherd stood outside the cave and called to his flock; his sheep, and only his sheep, went to meet him.

III. Vs 27=THEY ARE KNOWN TO ME

1. Again, note the present tense of the verb.

2. "Know" is *epiginosko*, i.e., to fully and completely know.

3. Contrast ranchers and shepherds; with rare exceptions, a rancher would not "know" an individual animal; shepherds do.

4. This fact is one of the most difficult for Christians to sincerely believe, that is, that Christ knows, and values, each of His personally.

IV. Vs 27=THEY FOLLOW ME

1. Jesus continues using present tense verbs.

2. He does not drive His sheep, but leads them.

3. If you can identify the leader, you have identified the follower; the follower is defined by whom or what he follows.

V. Vs 28=I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE

1. Two Greek words are used in the New Testament for "life;" *bios* and *zoe*; the first speaks of biological life, the second of spiritual life---God's kind of life, heaven's kind of life as contrasted with that of the earth. The second word is used here.

2. Again, the present tense speaks of the present possession of eternal life, which does not begin at death, but at conversion.

- 1) It is not probational life, possible life, provisional life, but permanent life.
- 2) V28=Note the promise that such people will never perish; the Greek says “and by no means they (will) perish unto the ages...”
- 3) V28=Note the reiteration of the promise, “...neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”
- 4) V29=The believer’s ultimate security is that he is also in the grip of God Himself. For a believer to lose his security, both the grip of God the Father and the grip of God the Son must be broken.
 - (1) The “any man” of vs 28 is the Greek *tis*, and the “no man” of vs 29 is the Greek *oudeis*, i.e., nothing and nobody.

CONCLUSION

1. These matters settle once and for all, in the plainest language imaginable, that of the believer’s ultimate security in Christ.
2. See Rupert Brooke’s lines:

Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death’s endeavor;
Safe though all safety’s lost: safe when men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

WHEN FEAR DIES

John 14:1-6

1. Because Jesus spoke of his impending death (John 13:21f), fear possessed His disciples.
2. See his painful promise of 13:21.
3. His message in chapter 14 is “Fear’s Funeral.”

I. FAITH

1. “Look,” he says, “you’ve got to believe in something or someone; no person stands on thin air, so, believe in Me.”
2. Later, in vs 7, He re-emphasizes the faith factor: if you have known Me, you have known the Father; a mind-boggling assertion, and one that must be accepted by a mighty leap of faith.
3. That leap of faith is stated plainly, explicitly, to Phillip in vss 8-11.

II. FAMILY

1. “My Father has a house! I grew up there. I know every inch of it. I have had the run of it for all eternity past. And I know whereof I speak: there is enough room in it, believe Me, for you!”
2. What a difference a house makes!
 - 1) A house / home is one of the most determinative influences on humans, especially our first one.
 - 2) It enters into the psyche, and is woven into the very fabric of our existence more deeply than most of us are conscious of.
 - (1) A staff-member’s wife recently lost her mother to death, and she made a trip back home to “tell the house good-bye,” she said. She had been born in the house and had lived most of her life there. Those who have walked in her steps will understand.
 - (2) An emotionally-disturbed church member once told me about that same sort of influence of a house / home. “I always knew, if I could just get inside that white picket fence, everything would be all right.”
 - (3) Someday, we’ll be at home, truly be at home, in heaven; that is our real home.
 - a. To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.

From *The House of Christmas*, G.K. Chesterton

- b. “Just think of...waking up in heaven and finding it *home*!” (See p. 120)

III. FUTURE

1. Three huge questions dominate human existence: where did I come from, what does life mean, and where am I going?

2. Ultimately, only the third one matters, for obvious reasons.
3. Jesus says, this is your future: “I am going to prepare a place.... come again...be with me.”
 - 1) Note Thomas’ question. Because Thomas does not know does not mean that Jesus does not know!

CONCLUSION

1. An appropriate title for the sermon Jesus preached here is “The Funeral of Fear.”
2. No fear ever existed that the themes of FAITH, FAMILY, AND FUTURE WILL NOT DISSIPATE.
3. *Remember: it is not what troubles a man that defines him; it is what reassures a man that defines him.*

GOING HOME WITH JESUS

Luke 24:13-25

1. The literature of the world is filled with interesting conversations; that is especially true of the Bible
2. Our text describes one such conversation, with striking implications for all believers.
3. About this conversation, note:

I. Vss 13=THOSE WHO ENGAGED JESUS IN CONVERSATION WERE BELIEVERS.

1. That, of course, is precisely why He initiated the meeting; Jesus speaks to belief, not unbelief.
2. They had doubts, but were not unbelievers; that is a vital distinction; *doubt is a matter of the head, unbelief of the heart.*

II. Vss 14-15=THE CONVERSATION WAS ABOUT DIVINE THINGS

1. What will be the subject of life's final conversations?
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once asked, "Why don't we say the ultimate things?"
3. In the light of Jesus' resurrection, and its implications, everything else becomes trivial.

III. Vss 15f=JESUS WAS LISTENING TO THE CONVERSATION WITHOUT THEM KNOWING IT

1. He is involved in every conversation!
2. What does He hear us saying?

IV. Vss 18f=JESUS ENGAGED THEM IN PERSONAL CONVERSATION

1. What a marvelous, but unrealized, privilege!

V. Vss 25f=THEY LET JESUS SPEAK

1. This was dialogue, not monologue, as is much "conversation" with God.
2. All authentic fellowship is based on dialogue.
3. Note that He gently chided them about their lack of understanding, and application, of Biblical truth.
4. They received, in this conversation, something for their heads, *and for their hearts as well.* We all need information, but, at critical times in our lives, we need inspiration as well.

VI. Vss 28f=THEY INVITED HIM TO GO HOME WITH THEM

1. See "constrained," in v29; the word is *parabiadzomai*, "to force against nature or law," "to compel by force," or "to constrain by entreaty." It is used in the third sense here, and is used in the entire New Testament only here and in Acts 16:16, where Lydia, the first convert in Europe "constrained" Paul to stay in her house. Thus, only Luke uses the word in the New Testament.
2. "Abide" is *meno*; "to remain with," "to stay in vital union with," etc.
3. "Tarry" is also *meno*.

CONCLUSION

1. Their request reminds us of the lines in the great hymn, *Abide With Me*:

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine thro' the gloom, and point me to the skies:
Heav'n's morning breaks and earth's vain shadows flee,
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

2. A boy told his mother about his Sunday School lesson, which had to do with the translation to heaven, without dying, of the Old Testament character Enoch. When his mother asked him how he thought that happened, the boy said, "Well, Enoch and God often walked together and talked together. One day, when it was late and they had to go home, the Lord said, 'Enoch, we're closer to my house than to yours; why don't you just come on home with me today?'" The boy added, cheerfully, "So he did!"

HOW IS THE CHILD?

II Kings 4: 8-37

1. The story line:
 - 1) Elisha becomes friends with a couple who live in Shunem, and often eats with them when traveling through their area.
 - 2) The couple build a room for their friend.
 - 3) The prophet inquires how he might help the family; they indicate that they have no son; he promises "About this season, according to the time of life, you shall embrace a son." (vs 16)
 - 4) 4:18-20=The child came, as predicted, but died when he was "grown;" i.e., when he was old enough to go into the fields. We do not know precisely how old he was, but he was young enough, according to v 20 that he sat on his mother's lap.
 - 5) 4:21f=The woman went to the prophet who, when he saw her approaching, sent his servant to ask her three questions: "Is it well with you," "is it well with your husband," and "is it well with your son?"
 - 6) The woman answers, "All is well," (v 26) apparently waiting to speak with the prophet.
2. From one perspective, all the questions could properly be answered with a resounding "No!"
 - 1) How can it be well with a father when his only son is dead? When all hopes and dreams and plans for his boy have been cruelly dashed?
 - 2) How can it be well with a mother when her only son, a son of prophetic promise, dies? Psychologists indicate that there is no pain so excruciating to a mother as losing her child.
 - (1) As I write these words, I am thinking about a call which I received at 1:30 this morning regarding a girl who was severely injured in an auto accident last night; her parents are, of course, traumatized at the thought of the possibility of losing their child.
 - (2) How can it be well with a child when he is cut down in the bloom of youth, with all the countless opportunities of life-experiences stretching out before him?
3. But from another perspective, the answer to all three questions is a solemn "Yes!"
 - 1) What is the situation seen from God's point of view?

I. GOD HAS PERSPECTIVE, i.e., God sees and knows things nobody else is privy to.

1. The prophet does not; see v 27.
2. The servant does not.
3. The boy's parents do not.
4. But God does:
 - 1) Because we do not have a clear perspective on ultimate things--- and we do not---does not mean that God does not.

II. GOD HAS POWER

1. In this case, He causes the boy to be resuscitated, and, obviously, demonstrates the power do accomplish the feat.

III. GOD HAS PLANS

1. The Bible records that God raised several people from the dead, and could do so today if He chose.
2. When He does not choose to do so, we must believe He has better plans; that alone explains His responses in all such situations.

1) God, in allowing “untimely” deaths, is, perhaps, protecting people from some horrendous future.

(See Isaiah 57:1-2, especially in modern versions.)

2) In any case, the boy in our story was forced to die again, at some future point in his life, and to produce sadness again when he did. *Not one of us can ultimately escape dying; all health is temporary.*

CONCLUSION

1. In v 23, the woman is quoted, in the KJV, as saying, “It shall be well.”
2. She is stunned and broken-hearted by the loss of her son, but she faithfully affirms, “Although it is not well now, it will be well some day.”
3. For her, victory came very soon; for us, it may take longer, but, finally, let us affirm before the world, it will be well.

1) See Romans 8:28f

4. From Kahlil Gibran:

Your children are not your children
They came through you but not from you.
And though they are with you yet they do not belong to you.
You may house their bodies but not their souls.
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
Which you cannot visit even in your dreams.
You are bows from which your children as living arrows are sent.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
So He loves also the bow that is stable.

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

II Timothy 4:6-8

1. The setting: Paul was, say the scholars, converted in about 36 AD; at this writing, he is now about 63 years old, a very advanced age for his day.

- 1) He is relatively old, sick, in prison, humiliated and, for the most part, forsaken by his friends.
- 2) This was written, probably, in the early spring of the year 68 AD, only weeks before his execution. (One author says it was written in early May.)

2. His "swan song;" See the myth of swans, which are mute, singing gloriously immediately before they die, thus, a "swan song."

- 1) See Shakespeare: "He makes a swan-like end, Fading in music." (*The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Sc. 2, L 44)
- 2) See Shakespeare: "I will play the swan and die in music." (*Othello*, Act V, Sc 2, L 243)
- 3) See Chaucer: "The Jalous swan, ayens in his deth that singeth." (*The Parlement of Foules*, L 342, sic)

I. Vss 6-7=THE PREPAREDNESS BEFORE HIS DEATH

1. v 6=Two words graphically picture preparedness:

- 1) *Spendomai*, a verbal form which pictures a drink-offering (or libation) being poured out before the Lord. (See Philippians 2:17 and II Corinthians 12:15 for the same idea.)
- 2) *Analusis*, a noun form which pictures the untying from moorings of a boat, loosening (striking) tent ropes, unyoking an animal following a day's work, etc.

2. V 7=Another poignantly beautiful sentence in reference to preparedness:

- 1) "I have fought a (or the) good fight;" some did not fight, or fought a very poor fight. Others have to say, "I fought a good fight, but in the wrong battle!"
- 2) "I have finished my course;" a reference to the hippodrome races; note the personal "my;" it is no comfort to admit that somebody else finished *their* course. (A hippodrome which dates back to Paul's day has been modernized, and is still in use in Athens.)
- 3) "I have kept the faith," i.e., "I have kept safe the deposit you put into my hands." No banks existed in Paul's day, thus, one's belongings were often entrusted to others who were thought fully trustworthy.
- 4) Many are not ready for death; Paul was; that's important because death, very often, sounds like the child's game: "Ready or not, here I come!"
 - (1) "But maybe I have more time." But maybe not!
 - (2) See "Appointment at Samara," p. 141

II. Vs 8= THE PRIZE AFTER HIS DEATH

1. V 8="Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown..."

2. Not *diadema*, but *stephanos*; the first is the crown signifying royalty; the other signifies a victory won in the arena, in the military, etc.; it is gained by personal valor and achievement.

3. Why "righteousness?" That is what God is attempting to produce in all of us.

- 1) Hebrews 1:9="...thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity..."

4. “And not to me only, but to all those...”

1) If we truly love His appearing, we will automatically pursue righteousness.

2) St. Francis was asked by a young monk what he would do if he knew today was his last day to live. Francis smiled and said he would continue his assignment--hoeing the weeds out of the garden. That was God's agenda for him for the day.

CONCLUSION

1. A well-known psychiatrist once said that a man must have a sense of “future” in order to be emotionally healthy. He said that we should attempt, therefore, to create a “nostalgia---the word means *home-sickness*---for the future.” Paul, and all true Christians, possess such a “nostalgia for the future.”

A EULOGY FOR ABNER

II Samuel 3:17-39

1. Historical background:

- 1) Abner attempted reconciliation with David---3:17-19
- 2) David appreciated his effort, and was responsive to Abner's help---3:20-21
- 3) Joab did not want Abner to have any part in David's reign and so plotted to kill Abner---3:22-27
- 4) Joab and Abishai kill Abner---3:30
- 5) David's response is recorded in 3:31-39

I. Vs 31=DAVID MANDATES A TIME OF PUBLIC MOURNING FOR ABNER

II. Vs 31=DAVID AND THE PEOPLE BITTERLY LAMENT THE LOSS OF ABNER

III. DAVID, IN A BRIEF BUT MOVING EULOGY, WITNESSES TO:

1. The integrity of Abner---3: 33-34
2. The injustice of his death---3: 34
3. The invaluable position Abner had in national life---3:38

IV. Vs 39=DAVID LEAVES THE OUTCOME OF THE TRAGEDY TO GOD

1. Though he knew the "sons of Zeruiah," Joab and Abishai, were due punishment, because of the difficult political situation, and for the welfare of the nation, David did not execute them.
2. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." (James 1:20)
3. When David was returning to his throne following Absalom's rebellion, these same "sons of Zeruiah" wanted to kill a man who had troubled David (Shimei) and David rebuked them, saying, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be the adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do I not know that I am this day king over Israel? (II Samuel 19:22)
 - 1) Again, David knew a serious offense had been committed, and that God would, in His own time and His own way, exact the proper punishment (as He did against Shimei during the days of Solomon's reign), but there was no need to rush to judgment. (It is to be remembered that Abner had killed Asahel, David's servant, earlier but had done so in self-defense. See II Samuel 2: 18-23)
 - 2) Restraint is a sure sign of maturity; men rarely overdo it, and, often, spend lifetimes in regret for lack of it.
 - 3) "Discretion is the better part of valor." (Shakespeare has it, "The better part of valour is discretion;" see *King Henry IV*, Part I, Act 5, scene four, line 120)

CONCLUSION

1. When the American Civil War was over and his cabinet begged him to avenge himself and his country over the rebels of the south, Abraham Lincoln, in a rare display of emotion, quoted, from memory, David's words to those who demanded immediate revenge, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that

ye should this day be adverseries unto me? Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel?"

2. In his second Inaugural Address, Lincoln had said those immortal words which became a healing balm to a war-torn nation, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in...to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves..."

3. The loss of Abner, grievous as it was, could not be undone; that was, in the nature of the case, impossible, as it is for us. The loss, however, could be assuaged by refusing to compound it by passionate revenge. That is what Lincoln wanted for the nation and that is what God wants for His people.

4. When the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt died, his long-time friend and ally, Winston Churchill wrote: "He died in harness, and we may well say in battle harness, like his soldiers, sailors and airmen who died side by side with ours and carrying out their tasks to the end all over the world. What an enviable death was his." (Spoken to the House of Commons, April 17, 1945.)

WALKING WITH GOD

Genesis 5:21-24, Isaiah 40:31

1. Here we have the account of a man who walked with God; that was his claim to fame, and his only claim to fame.

I. THE FACT OF A MAN'S WALK WITH GOD

1. It is possible!
2. Micah told us how to walk with our God. (Micah 6:8)

II. THE FELLOWSHIP OF A MAN'S WALK WITH GOD

1. Amos asked if two could walk together without being agreed; fellowship involves knowledge, privilege, intimacy, enrichment, joy, etc.

III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF A MAN'S WALK WITH GOD

1. Enoch stayed at it for over 300 years, through thick and thin, through all the vicissitudes of life, when he had answers and when he did not have answers.

IV. THE FUTURE OF A MAN'S WALK WITH GOD

1. Revelation 3:1-In the letter to the church at Sardis a special promise is given to the "overcomers:" "...and they shall walk with me in white." Forever!

1) Psalm 16:10="For thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol, neither wilt thou permit your Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

2) A lad explained to his mother what happened to Enoch: "Well, God and Enoch walked together all the time. One evening, about supper time, God said, 'Enoch, we're closer to my house than to yours, so why don't you just go home with me tonight? And he did!'"

2. A shocking fact: Enoch was 65 years old when he begot Methusaleh; see Amplified, Moffatt, NEB

CONCLUSION

1. Questions:

- 1) Could any man ever be sorry that he had walked with God?
- 2) Do we envy those who do not?
- 3) Would our lives have been more exciting if we had walked walked more intimately with God? If we had not?
- 4) Is there any good reason to put off beginning one's walk with God?

2. Note Jesus' word: "Follow me." (Matthew 4:19)

3. Not *Quo Vadis*, where are you going, *but with whom are you going!*

4. The line of the well-known Christian song, "I'll walk with God from this day on."

WHEN THE DELIVERER DOES NOT DELIVER

Psalm 91

1. The text reeks with powerful promises; the most explicit promises in the entire Bible in regard to personal deliverance. No clearer language could be used.
2. But does it work?
 - 1) Many positive testimonies are heard from ministers, missionaries, military people, and millions of others indicate that God keeps the promises of Psalm 91.
 - 2) But there is the other side, the other experiences when God did not deliver.
 - (1) V 1 of this Psalm was one of the favorite verses of Jim Elliot who, in 1957, was murdered, along with four other Christian missionaries, at the hands of the Auca Indians in Ecuador. Their story may be found in a book entitled, *Shadow of the Almighty*, (Elizabeth Elliott, Harper and Row, New York, 1996) a phrase taken from this very Psalm.

I. GOD ALWAYS MAKES GOOD ON ALL HIS PROMISES, BUT HE DOES IT ACCORDING TO HIS INTERPRETATION OF THOSE PROMISES, NOT OURS.

1. Our problem is that we read this promise and interpret it in a certain way, and then we hold God accountable to keep it according to our interpretation.
2. A basic principle: *Every Biblical promise can either be misinterpreted or misapplied.*
 - 1) See the proof here: do vs 11-12 sound familiar?
 - 2) Note Matthew 4:5-7 where Satan quotes scripture to Jesus; Jesus knew the promise was good, but not according to the interpretation others---in this context the devil---gave them.

II. GOD HAS MADE GOOD ON THIS PROMISE MANY MORE TIMES IN YOUR LIFE THAN YOU KNOW

1. Consider a future discussion with the Lord: “How many times did I save your life?, God asks.” Most people could recall such times, but, surely, no man knows all of them. Perhaps we were very close to death many times and never realized it.
2. Consider the possibility that God will punch up a computer screen and print out many pages recording such deliverances!
3. In fact, God may have delivered you a thousand times.

III. GOD ALWAYS GIVES US WHAT HE PROMISES, BUT HE MAY GIVE US MORE

1. When we think we did not get a deliverance, we may have received a much greater deliverance. All thoughtful persons know that it is very difficult at times to know whether an event is curse or a blessing.
 - 1) A woman, molested as a child, asked God why He allowed it. Why not just prevent her birth? God told her it could have been worse. And the event, horrible as it was, would, He communicated to her, enable her to sympathize with and give redemptive counsel to others who had horrendous experiences. And He told her something else: “*Yes, I knew it would happen, but I had to allow you to be born because I also knew you’d get through this and we’d get to spend eternity together and I didn’t want to miss that!*”

- 2) Upon hearing of the death of a child, I have taught myself to say: "I can only believe, Dear God, that You have delivered this child from some unspeakably horrible future." (See especially Isaiah 57:1-3.)
2. If God promises a thousand, He may give ten thousand, but he will never give nine hundred ninety nine!
 - 1) Nobody's running about heaven and screaming about God not making good on His promises.
 - 2) And nobody's running about heaven and saying he wishes God had come through differently.

IV. THIS PROMISE COULD NEVER COME TRUE WITHOUT DEATH

1. The passage appears to promise us deliverance from death, but in fact, death itself is a part of the blessing God promises here.
 - 1) Note vs 16—how could God show us any ultimate expression of His salvation apart from heaven?
 - 2) "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God..." (I Corinthians 15:50)
 - 3) Francis Bacon: "Death hath this also, that it opens the door to our fame."
 - (1) You want every blessing God has for you, and if so, you must walk through a door labeled "death" to obtain the best one.
 - (2) "Death is the supreme festival on the road to freedom." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

V. THESE PROMISES COME TRUE ONLY FOR CERTAIN PERSONS

1. Our assumption is that they come true, automatically, for all men.
 - 1) Two types of blessings occur: "automatic" and "actualized."
 - (1) Automatic: rain, sunshine, air, and countless others.
 - (2) Actualized: those a human sets in motion by what he does in obedience to God; Romans 8:28f, "...to those who love God and who are the called according to His purpose..."
 - a. As a caveat, "automatic" does not imply that any blessing is the result of implacable and impersonal law; God is still the author of all of them. See James 1:17.
2. This passage says the same thing: vs 1-2, 9, 14.

CONCLUSION

1. "Dear Lord, I now place myself in the place of blessing."
2. Frank Laubach once told a group I was in, when asked about God's promises: "God my Father is greater than any of His promises." Yes, well and good, but God the Father does not make promises He does not intend to keep. He is more than His promises, but He is at least as much as His promises. He does not cheapen them, nor must we.
3. What He promises, and what He does about those promises, constitute God's self-portrait. They are all we know of Him, or ever will know of Him.

God knows and loves and cares;
 Nothing this truth can dim;
 He always gives the very best to those
 Who leave the choice to Him.

WHEN DEATH APPROACHES

Mark 14:32-42

1. All of us know that we must die, but few can know the precise time; Jesus knows both facts.
2. We often say that we would like to know the future, but, upon reflection, most people change their minds about that wish.
3. Some do know when death approaches; how shall we respond to that knowledge if it is our experience?
 - 1) The essential answer is: by communicating with the Father even as Jesus does in our passage.

I. Vs 36=THE RELATIONSHIP IN PRAYER

1. “Abba” is an Aramaic word, a term of intimate familiarity; it is very personal, comparable to our “Daddy.” (Aramaic was probably Jesus’ native tongue.)
2. Jesus addressed God, not as a stranger, not as an automaton, not as a philosophical construct, but as a Father with whom He has close and personal contact. Compare “Our Father which are in heaven...”

II. Vs 36=THE REQUEST IN PRAYER

1. Vs 36=“Let this cup pass from me...”
2. Our Lord was sane! He knew the trauma of his coming death.
 - 1) It is not unspiritual or immature of a Christian to pray for the preservation of life.
 - 2) This prayer was, actually, “I know that I must die, but for ministry’s sake, do not let it happen that does not perfectly accord with your will for my life.”

III. Vs 36=THE RATIONALE IN PRAYER

1. Vs 36=“All things are possible with thee...”
2. Only God is capable of preventing death, but God is capable of doing so.
3. Our problem is not that God cannot prevent death, but precisely that He can! If He can, why does He not until a “better time,” or in a “better circumstance,” etc.?
4. Death would be easier if God possessed no such power. See Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:1-5, where the King prays for an extension of life and is granted an additional fifteen years. Why to him and not to us? That is our problem.
5. Jesus was, obviously, not informing God as to God’s power; He was reminding Himself in God’s presence---as we must---that He knew and depended on God’s sovereignty.

IV. Vs 36=RELINQUISHMENT IN PRAYER

1. Vs 36=“nevertheless...”
2. In the incarnation, Jesus *assumed* a subordinate role; see Philippians 2:5f
 - 1) We can say those words in anger, fatalistic resignation, or in obedient joy, as Jesus did here.
 - 2) “You know better than I what is best and I submit, gladly, to that...”
 - (1) “Lo, it is written in the volume of the book, I come to do thy will, O God.” (Hebrews 10:7)
 - (2) Many saints, although they have not used the precise words of Jesus here, have made the same

commitment to the Father as Jesus did when death approached.

CONCLUSION

1. Upon the discovery of approaching death, the flesh is likely to become either panicky or passive; to run from it or to give up to it.
2. Vs 42 shows Jesus' response: "Rise up, let us go..." i.e., let us take the next step in life's pilgrimage. To put it another way: "Let us not go to the cemetery before we have to go to the cemetery."
3. Jesus ministered to many people after facing the fact of His impending death; so must we, even if the time be short.

Let Me Die, Working

Let me die, working.
Still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone!
Clean to its end, swift may my race be run.
No laggard steps, no faltering, no shirking;
Let me die, working!

S. Hall Young

GOD WITH ME

Psalm 23

1. “For thou art with me...” are but two words in the Hebrew, but one of the most powerful phrases in all the world’s literature.
2. It is a marvelous privilege to worship a transcendent God, the ruler of the worlds, but more marvelous to worship Him as a Friend, Companion, Confidant.
 - 1) We have here the transcendence / immanence paradox; He is both and we need both at all times, but especially at death. Is He sufficiently removed from humanity to stand above us and manage the problems of the cosmos, and yet is He near enough to walk with us through life’s crises.
3. The believer has peace at death. Why? “For” is a word of rationale, and his rationale for the absence of fear and the presence of peace (they are not identical experiences) in the face of death is given in the four words:

I. THOU ART WITH ME; THE GREAT PERSONAGE

1. Who is the “thou?” Creator, sustained, consummator of the universe!
2. Isaiah 57:17 says that He is the “high and lofty One who inhabits eternity.”
3. I Timothy 1:17 says He is the “king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God...”

II. THOU ART WITH ME-THE GREAT PRESENCE

1. No verb form exists here in the Hebrew; it is understood; often this is the case with copulative verbs.
2. Man does not need God in the past or the future, but only in the eternal “now.”
 - 1) When yesterday was “now” we needed Him; when tomorrow is “now” we will need Him, but all we have is the current “now,” and in the current “now” we both need Him and have Him.
3. All believers experience Him as Moses did, i.e., as the great I AM. (Exodus 3:14, cf John 8:58, “Before Moses was, I am...”)

III. THOU ARE WITH ME: THE GREAT PARTNERSHIP

1. What, precisely, is His relationship to us? In this little “with” is vouchsafed the entire answer.
2. At death we need His nearness, and *the sense of His nearness*; the two experiences, again, are not identical.
 - 1) A mother told her boy, who was fearful of the night, that God was with him. “There’s no reason to be afraid,” she assured him. “Yes,” the lad said, “I know God will be there, but I need somebody with skin on to be with me, too.”
 - 2) In Jesus, God put on skin, but skin or no skin, He is with me and will be forever.
 - (1) I Samuel 12:22-”God will not forsake His people.”
 - (2) I Kings 8:57-”God will not leave us, nor forsake us.”
 - (3) Joshua 1:5-”He will never leave us nor forsake us.”
 - (4) Hebrews 13:5-”He will never leave us nor forsake us.”
 - a. Note the line of the song: “I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.”

IV. THOU ART WITH *ME*: THE GREAT PRIVILEGE

1. One is not surprised that God chose to walk with Enoch (Genesis 5:24) or with Noah (Genesis 6:9), or with Abraham (Genesis 48:15), but to imagine that He should choose to walk with common believers like us defies our imagination at times.
2. He said, however, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isaiah 41:10)
3. And better still, that companionship lasts through eternity: in Revelation 3:4, we are told that victorious believers “shall walk with me in white” forever!
4. See the story of the Welsh shepherd boy, p. 136.
5. The last words out of the mouth of the dying John Wesley were these: “The best of all is: God is with us.”

WHEN WE'RE HOME

Revelation 21-22

1. Many Christians spend their entire life-times poring over the map of the road to heaven and never give a thought to the terminal point.
2. Precisely what is heaven like?
 - 1) Dr. Vance Havner once said, "God does not remove the veil, but He does, at times, thin the veil."
 - 2) In our text, God "thins the veil."
3. Heaven is:

I. 21:1-2,9-11, 26=UNIMAGINABLE BEAUTY

II. 21:25=UNRESTRAINED FREEDOM

III. 21:27=UNSULLIED PURITY

IV. 22:1-3=UNBOUNDED BLESSING

V. 22:3=UNHINDERED SERVICE

1. Note the verb tense; we shall continue, forever, to serve Him.

VI. 21:3-4, 22:4=UNCLOUDED SIGHT

1. Contrast visual powers here on earth with those of heaven!

VII. 22:5=UNENDING DELIGHT

1. "When we've been there ten thousand years..."
2. In the familiar Christmas song, *Joy to the World*, are these lines, "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found."
3. Remember: there is no devil on the first two pages of the Bible, and there is no devil on the last two pages of the Bible.

IN THE MORNING

Psalm 49: 1-20

1. The sentence that often closes the day is, "See you in the morning."
2. All the world loves a morning; much of poetry, music, literature, etc., focuses on that subject.
 - 1) Mornings represent freshness, new beginnings, new opportunities, nature's beauties, etc.
 - 2) As a lad, I loved some small lavender flowers called "Morning Glories;" they got their name from their habit of turning themselves toward the rising sun and then opening their faces for the day.
 - 3) Various species of cacti also open their faces to the morning sun.
 - 4) "Sunflowers" watch the sun all day, their faces following it through its daily course.
 - 5) Robert Browning's famous *Pippa Passes* celebrates the morning:

The year's at the spring
The day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven---
All's right with the world.

3. Many think of aging as moving toward the sunset, not the sunrise; toward evening, not toward morning.
 - 1) "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom..." (From John Henry Newman, *The Pillar of the Cloud*)
 - 2) "While the mortal mist is gathering..." (From William Wordsworth, *Character of the Happy Warrior*)
4. The Christian is moving toward the sunrise, the morning.
 - 1) Joshua 19:12=" They journeyed...toward the sunrising..."
 - 2) Exodus 16:17="And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD..."
 - (1) They were to see His glory in judgment, but also in mercy.
 - (2) In which morning is the glory of the Lord seen?

I. ON THE FIRST MORNING OF ALL MORNINGS when glorious hues of sun-drenched colors were splashed across the universe "when the morning stars sang together." (Job 38:7)

II. ON CHRISTMAS MORNING when God walked down the stairs of heaven with a baby boy in His arms.

III. ON THE FIRST EASTER MORNING when Jesus broke the bonds of darkness and death.

IV. ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH

1. Some lines from Christian hymns re the morning:

- 1.) "Some golden daybreak, Jesus will come..."
- 2.) "By and by when the morning comes, when the saints of God are gathered home..."
- 3.) "Some glad morning when our work is o'er..."

V. ON PARADISE MORNING if we go to be with Him before His return.

VI. ON HEAVEN'S MORNING

1. Will it be an eternal morning, as some say?
2. Psalm 49:14-15 says of that morning:
 - 1) REDEMPTION: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave..." (vs 15)
 - 2) RECEPTION: "...FOR HE SHALL RECEIVE ME." (VS 15)
 - (1) Jesus promised it in John 14:3: "I will come again and receive you to myself..."
 - (2) Many receptions will occur today on this planet, but nothing like this!
 - 3) ROYALTY: "And the upright shall have dominion..."
 - (1) We shall reign with Him.

VII. ON TOMORROW MORNING

1. Tomorrow morning will have its blessing, whether here or there.
2. Lamentations 3:22-23="It is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning (whether in heaven or on earth!); great is thy faithfulness."

CONCLUSION

1. Let your journey be toward the sunrise!
2. It's dark now, but the morning's coming!

STEPHEN'S LEGACY

Acts 7:54-60

1. For Stephen's story and position in the early church, see Acts 6: 1-14.
2. A good man is murdered.
3. His life has all the marks of a tragedy about it, full of exasperating injustices.
4. Stephen is dead, but Stephen can never be dead; he leaves a legacy which stretches beyond our imagination.

I. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF A VIRTUOUS CHARACTER; see 6:5

II. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF HAVING BEEN CHOSEN TO SERVE IN A SIGNIFICANT POSITION IN THE EARLY CHURCH; see 6:5

III. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF BEARING A FAITHFUL WITNESS TO CHRIST UNDER VERY TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES; see 6:9-10

1. The English word "martyr" comes from the Greek word *martus*, which means, precisely, a witness.

IV. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF HAVING A SPECIAL SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD; see 6:15, 7:55-56

V. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF DRAMATICALLY AFFECTING THOSE ABOUT HIM FOR CHRIST

1. Tradition says that Saul / Paul was deeply moved by the spirit with which Stephen testified and died. (See Acts 7:58)
2. It has been said that the church owes her greatest spokesman to Stephen in his death.

VI. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF MANIFESTING, IN THE MOST TRYING OF CIRCUMSTANCES, THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST; see 6: 10,6:15, 7: 59-60

VII. HE LEAVES A LEGACY OF LEAVING THE CHURCH IN GREAT SORROW BECAUSE OF HIS DEATH; see 8:2

1. The church does not sorrow upon the occasion of all deaths!
2. Stephen's loss represents an immense loss to the church; very probably, there were those who thought he could never be replaced.
3. Edwin Markham, in speaking of Lincoln's death, referred to it as being comparable to a "lordly cedar" falling which "leaves a lonely place against the sky." (From *Lincoln, the Man of the People*)

CONCLUSION

1. Men name their dogs, not their sons Nero, but millions have named their sons after Stephen.
 - 1) This is the only Stephen, either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament; all Stephens derive

from this one!

2. The name “Stephen” is from the Greek word *stephanos*, i.e., a crown. Another word is used in the New Testament for crown: *diadema*. The two distinguishable in that *diadema* is a crown of nobility, of royalty, while *stephanos* is an award given because of the accomplishment of some deed of valor such as a military conquest, a victory in athletic competition, etc. *Diadema* emphasizes authority, *stephanos* achievement.

3. Neither time nor eternity can take away Stephen’s crown! Fully deserved and fairly given, it never fades. “Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear.” (Romans 13:7)

4. Note: Stephen saw Jesus standing on God’s right hand, not *sitting*, as He is usually seen in Scriptures. Christ stood, as an act of honor, to receive His faithful servant and martyr.

IN A LITTLE WHILE

John 16:16

1. History is divided into two ages, according to the Bible; the age that now is, and the age to come.
 - 1) We live, as the Germans say, “zwischen den zeiten,” between the times.”
 - 2) Jesus speaks of the paradox of pain now but pleasure then; puzzlement now, but peace then.
 - 3) Here, He says, “In a little while...”

I. Vs 22=YOUR HEART WILL REJOICE

1. Jesus was a prophet and, therefore, knew the future.

II. Vs 21=YOU WILL FORGET YOUR PAIN AS SOON AS I COME

1. Not ten days later! Not after a purgatorial process!

III. Vs 23=THE PUZZLEMENT WILL BE GONE

1. See His other word, “In that day you will ask me nothing...;” you will have the answers. (John 16:23)

IV. Vs 22=YOU WILL SEE JESUS THEN

1. The Catholics speak of the “beatific vision,” that is, the vision of God Himself, following death.

V. Vs 22=NO MAN WILL TAKE YOUR JOY AWAY

1. Certainly the case here! The Makers of Misery and the Destroyers of Delight proliferate.
2. Pain seems pressing and persistent, even permanent.
3. The opposite is true there: “When we’ve been there ten thousand years...”
 - 1) “Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God.” (Paul Tillich)

CONCLUSION

1. God’s calling, then, is for us to live overcomingly, redemptively, constructively, in *The Great Until*.
 - 1) I Corinthians 4:5= “Judge nothing *until* the day...”
 - 2) Philippians 1:6= “He will perform it *until* the day...”
 - 3) I Timothy 6:14= “Keep the commandments of God *until* the appearing of the Lord Jesus.”
 - 4) Luke 21:24= “Jerusalem shall be trodden down *until* the times of the gentiles be over.”
 - 5) Matthew 13:20= “Let them both grow together *until* the harvest...”
 - 6) Matthew 26:29= “I will not drink it again with you *until* I drink it anew with you in the kingdom of God.”
 - 7) Luke 22:18= “*Until* the kingdom of God shall come...”
 - 8) Acts 2:35= “*Until* I make thy enemies thy footstool...”
 - 9) Acts 3:21= “Heaven has received Jesus *until* the time of the restitution of all things...”
 - 10) Galatians 4:19= “I travail in birth for you *until* Christ be formed in you...”
 - 11) II Peter 1:19= “*Until* he day dawn and the day star appear...”

12) Revelation 17:17="Until the words of God be fulfilled..."

13) Luke 19:13="Occupy *until* I come..."

But until then, my heart will go on singing,

Until then, with joy I'll carry on:

Until the day my eyes behold the city,

Until the day God calls me home.

(From the song *Until Then*, by Stuart Hamblen)

RESURRECTION RELATIONSHIPS

Luke 20:27-38

1. Easter is *the* day of the Christian year; nothing like it exists in all the other celebrations of humankind. Everything is downhill from there!
2. The essential message of Easter is: Jesus arose from the dead---and because of that fact, all Christians will also arise from the dead.
3. The huge question, then, is: “What relationships will obtain in the resurrection state?”
4. That was the question the Sadducees posed in our text.
 - 1) They revered somewhat the tradition of the written law, but rejected, for the most part, a literal interpretation of certain central Jewish convictions: they denied the existence of demons and angels, divine interposition in this life, the doctrines of rewards and retribution, heaven and hell, the immortality of the soul---*and the resurrection from the dead.*
5. Here, they attempt to entrap Jesus into admitting that the entire matter of resurrection, and resurrection relationships, is implausible, even absurd.
 - 1) They do so by referring to an old Jewish law called Levirate Marriage which required that a man must marry his dead brother’s wife if the brother had produced no children by that woman who could, among other things, preserve the family name.
 - 2) They were asking here, “What will resurrection relationships be when a woman has lived with seven different brothers as husband?”
 - (1) After clearly establishing the fact of resurrection itself (which, Jesus knew, was their essential problem)---vss 25-38, He established three resurrection relationships:

I. Vs 36=HE ESTABLISHED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO ANGELS

1. “Equal to the angels” is a difficult phrase, but in any case, Jesus affirms the Biblical doctrine---a highly developed doctrine---of angels, and says we will maintain a relationship to them in heaven.

II. Vss 37-38=HE ESTABLISHED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD HIMSELF

1. The believer will be there, the angels will be there, and the Lord will be there.
2. God is alive! And those who are His will be with Him! And that is true because He is the God of the living, not of the dead.
 - 1) The sentence means: “From His point of view, all men are living.”

III. HE ESTABLISHED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE

1. Note two special sets of relationships with other people:
 - 1) First, with the patriarchs; vs 37
 - 2) Second, with the family members; vss 35-36
 - (1) Jesus did not deny that we will retain our personal identity; in fact, both the question of the Sadducees and the answer of Jesus assume that fact.

(2) Our relationship will be based on the past, but will transcend it. See especially C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

(3) We are going to, for the first time, be able to understand and forgive as we never could before; our minds will be complete, our sanctification perfect, our characters totally Christ-like, and therefore, even though we exist in a different realm, we will know how to live in our drastically new environment.

a. "...and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death." (*How Do I Love Thee*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning) God has so chosen!

b. Which human believes anybody in our current limited state has exhausted all the meaning of what it means to love another?

CONCLUSION

1. Let us make right every relationship that is wrong and thus, better prepare ourselves for heaven.
2. Let us rejoice that in heaven God will make all things right; every relationship will be healed of all imperfections.
3. While admitting the mystery of such things, let us thank God sincerely for making provision for such a set of rich relationships in heaven.
 - 1) H.G. Wells used to insist that an eternity of H. G. Wells and nobody else would not be distasteful; it would be totally intolerable.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

John 10

1. The Bible has over 300 references to the shepherding task.
2. Jesus is often spoken of in terms of that task.
 - 1) I Peter 5:4=He is the Chief Shepherd
 - 2) Hebrews 13:20=He is the Great Shepherd
 - 3) John 10:14=He is the Good Shepherd

I. Vss 1-5= THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP IS PERSONAL

1. 1st century herds were often small; the name of each animal would be known by the shepherd; contrast with ranchers of the west today.
2. Note the word *own* in vss 3,4,14, and *mine* in 14, along with personal ownership being expressed in v 16; also the personal pronouns in 27 and 28. All of that expresses a profound intimacy between Jesus and His sheep.
3. Gilbert K. Chesterton once said “All men matter. You matter. I matter. It is the hardest thing in theology to believe.” (*The Complete Father Brown*, Penguin Books, New York, 1986, p. 613)
4. A professional American boxer gave all his six sons the same name, his own. When asked why he did so, he answered that brain damage from boxing might render him incapable of remembering their names. God has no such memory problems.
5. A woman was once asked, during a census, the number of her children. “They ain’t got numbers,” she said, “they got names.”
6. On a tombstone: “I was not, I was, I am not. Who cares?” Jesus does!

II. Vss 9-15=THE RELATIONSHIP IS PROVIDENTIAL

1. To be *saved* (v 9) is to experience provision at His hand.
2. To *go in and out and find pasture* (v 9) speaks of freedom and food; the phrase is another expression of salvation in its fullest sense.
3. To be given life (v 10; life is *zoe*, i.e., God’s quality of life as opposed to mere bios or biological life) is to experience true and full salvation.
4. V 12 speaks of salvation in terms of personal protection and care in life’s crises.
5. The ultimate expression of Christ’s provision is for Christ to give His life up for His sheep; such an act is mentioned here at least five times: vss 11, 15, 17, twice in v 18, etc.

III. Vss 27-28=THE RELATIONSHIP IS PERMANENT

1. A boy asked his mother an interesting question: “Will I always be me?” He actually meant, very probably, “Will you and I always have the same relationship we do today?” *We are identified by our relationships; only in them do I know who I am.*
2. In any case, the cosmic question to Christ by believers is, “Will you and I always have this same saving

relationship?” And the answer is “Yes!”

3. Note the present tense of the verbs in vss 27-28; we, now, beginning at the moment of salvation, possess eternal life.

4. Note the italicized words man in vss 27-28; the first one is the Greek *tis* (one, a certain one, someone, anyone, something, anything, etc.), and the second one is *oudeis* (no one, none, no one at all, nobody, etc.). The truth stated here by Christ is that no one and no thing can jeopardize our relationship with Him.

IV. Vs 29=THE RELATIONSHIP IS PROTECTED

1. *Pluck* (vss 28, 29) is *harpadzo*, that is, to grasp or jerk violently out of another's hand; the same word is translated *catcheth* in vs 12.

2. In order to possess the life of a believer, the enemy must break Jesus' grip (v 28) and God's grip (v 29).

CONCLUSION

Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavor;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe when men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Rupert Brooke

YOUR FUTURE EASTER

II Corinthians 5: 1-9

1. The sun affects every atom in the universe.
2. The Son, in His rising, does the same.
3. Among other things, because Jesus arose, so shall all who are His.
4. Our future Easter involves:

I. Vs 1=DISSOLUTION

1. V 1="For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were *dissolved*..."
2. One of the definitions of that Greek word is "to dismantle," as with a building; a graphic and accurate picture of human death.
 - 1) Paul's word here is not fiction, but fact; an altogether appropriate description of reality.
 - 2) "Change and decay in all around I see;/Oh Thou who changest not, abide with me!" (From the hymn *Abide With Me*.)
3. Some mystic power holds the universe and everything in it together.
 - 1) See Colossians 1:17; note the word translated consist; which actually means to adhere or to stick together.
 - 2) Some day that which holds the atoms of our bodies together will lose their adhesive quality; the body will become dismantled, literally.
 - 3) Note that Paul says we know these things; no hypothesis here! Upon his death, Socrates famously spoke of going to "the great perhaps."

II. Vss 2,4=DESIRE

1. Note the words *groan*, *earnestly desiring*, *groan*, *being burdened*, etc. in vss 2, 4.
2. Those words speak of the passion to possess a new body which is not subject to the limitations of time and space, and the "thousand natural shocks the body is heir to..." (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*)
3. The physical body is a marvel, but operates only in the sphere of earthly existence; we need another for heaven, produced by God Himself. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (I Corinthians 15:50)
4. The Greek gods granted the mythical Tithonus his desire, which was that he might live forever. They tricked him, however, as Greek gods were wont to do, by granting him his wish, but causing him to live on in his earthly body which continued to age normally. Before long, he was begging the gods to allow him to die because of the sheer deterioration of his body.

III. Vs 5=DESIGN

1. V 5="Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God..."
 - 1) Death does not surprise God. He has, in fact, made us for this very experience.
 - 2) The Apostle's Creed does not say that we Christians believe in the life everlasting; the word of the Creed about such things is: "We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

3) Michael Faraday, an early chemist, heard that a silver cup had fallen into a vat of powerful acid, dismantling the cup molecule by molecule. He performed an experiment with enlightening results. He poured other chemicals into the solution and the molecules of silver gathered at the bottom of the vat allowing Faraday to recover the metal. If simple chemistry can accomplish such a thing, can anyone doubt that God is able to recompose our bodies out of their scattered molecules?

IV. Vss 6-8=DELIGHT

1. Vss 6-8 express a sense of delight at what God has planned for every Christian.
2. Recently a psychotherapist said that we must develop a “nostalgia---or a homesickness---for the future” in order to have good mental health. God has given every one of His children such a “nostalgia for the future.”
3. “Eternal joy is the end of the ways of God.” (Paul Tillich)

V. Vs 9=DEDICATION

1. Vs 9=“Wherefore, we labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted by him” is a natural response to all these facts; it is a strong encouragement to those of us who remain when others die.
2. Present or absent literally means, while at home or away from home.

CONCLUSION

1. A French Christian, who was later canonized as St. Froterbert, had a blind mother. He grieved for her and prayed daily that God would restore her sight. Tradition says that one day, while praying for her, he kissed her blind eyes, and that they immediately opened to see the glory of a French morning. One day, Jesus will kiss the blind eyes of the saved dead and they will immediately be opened to see the eternal glory of the everlasting God.

WHEN A BABY DIES

II Samuel 12:16-23

1. Before sin could blight or sorrow fade,
Death came with friendly care
The opening bud to heaven conveyed
To let it blossom there.

2. On a hall-way wall of a high school buddy of mine hung a picture of a younger brother of his who had died as a lad of six or seven. These words were written under the picture:

I have a little brother,
His age I cannot tell;
They number not in days and years
Where he has gone to dwell.

3. Even though David was a king, he knew the inestimable sorrow of the loss of a child.

4. David's experience of the loss of his child witnesses to:

I. Vss 16-17= THE VALUE OF A CHILD

1. The kingdom of Israel shut down because of the child's death.

II. Vs 20a=THE VIRTUE OF WORSHIP

1. The one act which alone will assuage the unbearable pain of the loss of a child is worship.

III. Vs 20b=THE VALIDITY OF LIFE'S COMMON PURSUITS

1. At some point, one must return to life's common pursuits, even that of taking food.

IV. Vs 23b=THE VISION OF HEAVEN

CONCLUSION

1. See *Wordsworth's We Are Seven* written in 1789 at Alfoxden, England:

A simple child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;

Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
Her beauty made me glad.

“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?”
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we:
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet you are seven!--I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be?”

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then you are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,

“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sunset, Sir,
When it is light and fair,
I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

“The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

“So in the church-yard she was laid;
And when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If two of you are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!”
“Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

JESUS AND DEATH

John 11

1. Horatio Alger was a Unitarian minister from Massachusetts who died in 1899. He wrote almost 100 books, mostly for boys. The theme of many of them went something like this: a country boy flags down a train and, in the process, saves the life of a girl whom he discovers to be the local banker's daughter. The youngster is given a job as a messenger-boy in the bank, the banker's daughter falls in love with him, he marries her and becomes the junior partner in the bank, and they live happily ever after, as he progresses up the corporate banking ladder.

2. Life, alas, doesn't always turn out like Horatio Alger's stories; troubles---sometimes insurmountable troubles---come, and then, finally, the direst trouble of all, death itself, occurs.

1) That is not always because of personal sin.

2) It is not always because of God's judgment.

3) It is not always because of somebody else's specific sin.

4) It is not always because of an accident.

5) Nor is it always because either God or Satan is playing fiendish tricks upon us; it is simply the way the universe is constructed following Genesis chapter 3 and the fall of man.

(1) Certainly, all death is due to sin, but it is often impossible to attribute a specific death to a specific sin.

(2) So it was, as best we can know, with the death of Lazarus.

3. In any case, and in every case, Jesus is compassionate and caring; here He comes to comfort the family and is seen weeping.

1) He weeps for different reasons that we do at funerals. We weep because we have not been the blessing we should have been to the deceased, we have hurt them in some way, we have let them down, we have perpetrated some injustice upon them or their loved ones, or we weep simply because of our finiteness---we simply cannot do anything about the fact of their death.

2) More than likely, Jesus wept simply because of the common human condition; sickness and death descends upon us all. (Cf Wordsworth's "Hearing oftentimes, the still, sad music of humanity...") But certainly He wept because He loved Lazarus. (See vs 3, 11, 36, etc.) All three words (*love*) are from the noun *philos* and the verb *phileo*, both of which signify strong friendship.

4. What about Jesus and death?

I. THERE IS HIS PRESENCE

1. In the preceding chapter, He promised not to leave us as orphans; the Greek word is *orphanos*.

2. In the storm, the disciples thought they had seen a ghost, but it was Jesus who said, "It is I; be not afraid." In life's storms, He still comes to His own.

II. THERE ARE HIS PRAYERS

1. Jesus' public prayers are rare; this one is very instructive.
2. He continues to pray for us: "...he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

III. THERE IS HIS POWER

1. He raised Lazarus from the grave.
2. Romans 14:9="For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living."
 - 1) Jesus is lord over the two cavernous realms of the dead and the living; the only two categories involving all human beings.
 - 2) Jesus called Lazarus out, specifically and by name because had He not done so, every dead being in the universe would have arisen.
 - 3) He waited four days to come because, some say, the Jews believed if life returned before one was dead three full days, it was not a "true and complete" death.

IV. THERE IS HIS PROMISE

1. "Though he were dead, yet shall he live..."
2. If Lazarus could address us about the best day in his life, he would not refer, more than likely, to the day of his *resuscitation*, because loving hands brought him, finally, to another grave. His body was prepared for yet another funeral service, friends and loved ones gathered yet again and wept again as he was placed in a tomb. He would tell us, rather, that his best day was the day of his second visit to the cemetery, following which, he entered into the eternal presence of Christ where he has enjoyed unspeakable bliss for two thousand years now.
3. No kind man, even if he could, would bring Lazarus back again!

TWO HOMES AND TWO HOPES

Philippians 3:20-4:1

1. Home and hope are two of the strongest words in our vocabularies; they typically evoke a myriad of positive feelings.
2. At death, both words take on added significance.
3. Paul says Christians have two homes and two hopes in the future.

I. TWO HOMES (A Double Domicile)

1. His auditors lived in Philippi; “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” (1:1)
2. Actually, however, they were citizens, too, of Rome because Philippi was a Roman colony, that is, a garrison city, a piece of Rome removed from Rome proper.
 - 1) Roman language, customs, values, even clothing, prevailed there.
3. “Our *conversation* is in heaven...;” the word is *politeuma* and means “citizenship;” it is “in heaven,” that is, the reference point of our true citizenship is not on earth but in heaven.
 - 1) Analogously, Christians represent, collectively, a little piece of heaven, a colony of “The Heavens” as it were, on earth, and that fact dramatically affects how we live down here.
 - 2) Our language, customs, values, etc., ought to reflect our true homeland and not that of the local citizenry.
 - (1) You may have fifty addresses during your earthly pilgrimage, but be certain you have one in heaven, cosmically moored in eternity while you walk in time.

II. TWO HOPES (A Double Destiny); though there are many, many events which will mark the Lord’s return, Paul mentions only two here:

1. The return of the Saviour; note the four names given for our Lord: *Saviour, Lord, Jesus, Christ*, each of which has immense implications both in time and eternity.
 - 1) “Hope of all our hopes the sum, come and take thy waiting people home...”
2. The resurrection of the body
 - 1) He is the one who shall change us; He is in charge of all alterations.
 - 2) *Vile* body is “the body of our humiliation,” that is, the body subject to all its time and space limitations; the word does not, as it does in modern parlance, have the sense of vulgar, despicable, etc.
 - 3) “Like unto His glorious body...” that is, “the body of His glory,” like the body of His resurrection. See I John 3:1, II Corinthians 5:1-5, I Corinthians 15: 35-58, etc.
 - 4) All that requires an immense, indeed, an unimaginable authority and power, but God is capable! “According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.” Perhaps no verse in the entire Bible is more descriptive of the power of the risen Saviour.
 - (1) If Jesus as co-creator of the universe (John 1:3) was able to subdue the element of the *original* creational moment to Himself, He will surely be able to do so with the second creational moment.

Oh, how glorious and resplendent,
Fragile body, thou shalt be,
When endued with so much beauty;
Full of health, strong and free,
Full of vigor, full of pleasure,
Thou shalt last for eternity.

Now with gladness, now with courage,
Bear the burdens on thee laid,
That hereafter these thy labors
May with endless gifts be paid,
And in everlasting glory
Thou with brightness be arrayed.

CONCLUSION

1. 4:1="Therefore," that is, based on the perfect hope and the perfect home, "stand fast in the Lord..." while you live here on this planet.

THE BREVITY OF LIFE

Psalm 90

1. The setting of the psalm: it is authored probably, say the scholars, by Moses. The plea of the psalm relates to national life, but to the author personally as well.
2. “Bothered by my brevity, shocked by my shortness, moved by my mortality, I sing this song!”

I. COMPARISONS REVEALING OUR CONDITION

1. Vs 4= “...yesterday when it is past...;” it seemed so long when it was occurring, but , in retrospect, seems to have lasted such a short time.
2. Vs 4= “...a watch in the night...” probably refers to a military watch of several hours.
3. Vs 5=a flood whose waters have subsided
4. V 5=the grass in the field; green now, but presently, it is burned away by the morning sun
5. V 9-a brief story we once told somebody, as a bedtime story to a child
6. Vs 10-a bird we now see on the horizon, but which is is gone in moments
 - 1) All through the passage, our ephemerality is contrasted with God’s eternity. (See vss 1-2)

II. CONCLUSIONS REGARDING OUR CONDITION

1. Vs 12= “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”
 - 1) In retrospect, will we, at our death, say that we gave ourselves to those things which truly reflect wisdom? Is “Trivial Pursuit” to be our brief biography?
 - 2) Note the word “apply;” our need is not to think about wisdom, to study wisdom, to attempt to fathom wisdom, to write about wisdom, but to practice it.
 - 3) In Hebrew thought, wisdom is not academic but practical and pragmatic; it is manifest by moral activity, not mental activity.

III. COUNSEL REDEEMING OUR CONDITION

1. Negatively: not by attempting to sustain our physical lives forever, not by mummification (either literal or symbolic), not by cryogenics (the freezing of the body in hopes that medical science one day might be able to bring it back to life), etc.
2. Positively: Note his five petitions:
 - 1) Vs 14=Let me receive God’s forgiveness early so that, for an entire lifetime, I may serve and praise Him; why wait for old age?
 - 2) Vs 15=Let us be glad as many days (and years!) as you have afflicted us. For the Christian, how vast the disparity between the days of our difficulty and his eternal blessednesses!
 - 3) Vs 16=Let us become acquainted with the work of God and the glory of that work.
 - 4) Vs 17a=Let your beauty (literally, your favor, your pleasantness, your gracious kindness, etc.) be upon us. Again, show us your mercy, not your wrath, which we so richly deserve.
 - 5) Vs 17b=Let us give ourselves to something which will outlast us. “Establish the work of our hands, yea...”

- (1) Note what fantastic ends we go to in order to make ourselves immortal; psychologists say we do many things--produce children, create businesses, erect monuments to ourselves, etc., to do that.
- (2) Only by giving ourselves to God's work, however, can we achieve, by His grace, a desirable immortality.

CONCLUSION

1. The following famous hymn by Isaac Watts is based on Psalm 90:

O, God our help in ages past,
Our help for years to come..."
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!

O, God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home.

DON'T LIVE IN THE CEMETERY!

Genesis 35:16-21

1. Funerals are extremely difficult events; they are marked by a sense of a unutterable finality. Their purpose is to let a life go out into eternity, to let loose our embrace of a loved one when every fiber of our being screams to hold on to them.

1) We are forced to commit the body of our beloved one to the ground and then to turn and walk away.

2) The steps which take us away from the grave are perhaps the most difficult in human in all of life's journey.

2. The death of such a special person not only stuns us, it often stops us; we become, as it were, terminally fixed at a gravesite.

3. A thousand ties bind us there, the mystic chords of life and logic and love hold us there.

1) Our entire being---mind, will, emotions---recoil from leaving; we hate the idea.

4. No man ever loved his wife more than a man named Jacob loved a woman named Rachel.

1) Those familiar with the Bible story remember how this man fell hopelessly in love with her the very first time he ever saw her, how he served seven years for her, only to be tricked into marrying her older sister Leah, and then was forced to work for another seven years before he won his beloved Rachel.

2) God gave the two a boy, Joseph, and then, later, another. See Genesis 35:16-18.

(1) That second boy was forever to be known as Benjamin and to give his name to many thousands of other boys, but so distraught was his mother when he was born that she gave him his original name---Benoni, *son of my sorrow*.

(2) And even though Jacob changed his name to Benjamin, he surely was the son of his sorrow, as well, as he remembered, for the remainder of his life, the circumstances attending his birth.

5. And Jacob stood where we stand; see v 19.

1) Millions of visitors to the Bible lands have stood there, and have recalled this story and Jacob's great pain in laying the body of his treasured Rachel in a grave.

2) He felt precisely as we do today: "I don't want this to end, I don't want this to be over, I can't just walk away from Rachel."

6. But look at the very next sentence: "And Israel (Jacob) journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar." He chose not to live in a graveyard, even one which held Rachel!

7. Why must we leave a cemetery?

I. BECAUSE GOD HAS OTHER WORK FOR US TO ACCOMPLISH

1. His assignment does not stop today; a page must be turned, and we must move on with the remainder of life's book.

II. BECAUSE OTHERS ARE HURTING AND NEED US

1. See Harry Emerson Fosdick's appropriate quote on p. 144.

III. BECAUSE OUR OWN HEALING DEMANDS IT

1. Service is a sovereign cure for emotional pain.
2. If we become transfixed by this, mesmerized by this, if this becomes our permanent address, we forever prevent our own healing.

IV. BECAUSE OUR LOVED ONE WANTS IT FOR US

1. Contemplate their speech if they could communicate with us: "Look, my life is not done; I am simply at a new address. I must go on to my adventure, and you must go on to yours. Even though our paths diverge here, they shall, infallibly, cross again. Let us both anticipate, in great joy, that day.

In the meantime, let us both praise God for *His* itinerary!"

- 1) Socrates' death was the second most famous death in western civilization. Just before he died he said to his friends: "The hour of departure has arrived, and we must go our ways--I do die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows."
- 2) Socrates was a very wise man, but he missed the obvious: both life and death may be the best, in proper context. Indeed, both were the best for both Jacob and Rachel as they each went different ways.
2. There is a sense in which Jacob could never leave Rachel there; his heart, surely, ever and again visited the place. God had enabled him, however, to go to on to His fuller purposes.

CONCLUSION

1. One of the saddest lines in all of English poetry is that of Edna St. Vincent Millay: "Life goes on...I forget just why."
2. The "why" is God's great purpose, whether on earth or in heaven.
3. Thus,

Until then my heart will go on singing
Until then with joy I'll carry on;
Until the day I behold the city,
Until the day God calls me home.

(From the song *Until Then* by Stuart Hamblen)

(Other texts with the same theme: (a) Joshua 1: 1-2="Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spoke unto Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 'Moses my servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this Jordan...,'" and (b) Matthew 14:12="And his disciples came, and took up the body (of John) and buried it, and went and told Jesus.")

DON'T LET EVIL WIN

Romans 12:14-21

1. The profoundest problem of human existence: the triumph of evil. Why does it have the final say so often?
2. That fact breeds a spirit of frustration, cynicism, despair, helplessness.
3. How shall we respond? With what weapon shall we fight the demons of despair? With what glue shall we stick the days together again? How shall we make sense of the senseless?
4. Our text is a Bible passage so strange that it must be true. It is so paradoxical that it defies rationality, but, very often, that which is not rational works.

I. THE MESSAGE

1. Don't retaliate! Note five references prohibiting it:
 - 1) Vs 14
 - 2) Vs 17
 - 3) Vs 18
 - 4) Vs 19
 - 5) Vs 20
2. Overcome evil with good
 - 1) Evil does exist; it is not a figment, not a phantom, not a figure of speech, not a philosophical construct, but a hard, palpable, measurable reality.
 - 2) If it is possible to overcome evil with good, as our text says, *then it means that good must be more powerful than evil.*
 - (1) That is a shocking concept which runs counter to worldly wisdom; it is, however, a thoroughly Biblical one.
 - (2) The prime example in all history: the crucifixion appears to be a profound defeat when it is, instead, a profound victory. It bears every evidence of a cosmic loss, but it a cosmic win.
 - 3) One must cause the victory to occur *by an act of the will.*
 - (1) "Overcome" is from the strong Greek verb *nikao*, "to conquer," and is in the imperative mood, the language of command.
 - (2) Note the emphasis on the will in vss 14, 17, 18, 19, 20. Victory is not automatic.

III. THE MEANS

1. We are to stand against every destructive force in the community.
 - 1) Thomas Jefferson said: "I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."
2. We are to affirm and assist every redemptive institution in society.
 - 1) William Blake: "I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall the sword sleep in my hand,
Till I have built Jerusalem

In England's green and pleasant land.”

3. See Harry Emerson Fosdick's *The Meaning of Service*, London: Student Christian Movement, 1921, p. 174.

FUNERAL SERMON STARTERS

1. THROUGH THE SHADOWS=Psalm 23 I. Shadows hide reality. They prevent us from seeing what is truly there. II. If shadows do not hide reality, they distort it. See the "Parable of the Cave" in Plato. A picture is nothing more than a *representation* of reality, but we commonly equate the shadow as reality. III. Shadows are fearful at times. We say, "He is afraid of his shadow," or "He is a shadowy character," etc. Children's Halloween games make use of shadows in order to frighten others. We create shadows on walls for the same purpose. IV. Shadows appear to be substantive, but are not. The smallest candle dispels them immediately *when the candle is properly placed so as to do so*. V. Light creates shadows. Without light no shadow could exist. Light, however, also conquers them. See the Song of Solomon 2:17. VI. One day, the Light will conquer every shadow. What is possible will become universal fact. Jesus is the light of the world. (John 8:12) "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." (I John 1:5) Several scriptures speak of the impermanence of shadows: I Chronicles 29:15, Job 8:9, 14:2, Psalm 144:4.

2. REMEMBERING GOD=Ecclesiastes 12:1-7="Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth..." Many have! Note the unusually graphic metaphorical description of the aging process in vs 3-6. Verse 7 is a rare Old Testament expression of the certainty of eternal life in God's presence. Compare this to the fully developed New Testament view of life and death, notably as expressed in I Corinthians 15 and II Corinthians 5, and, of course, in the Easter event.

3. THE HERITAGE OF CHILDREN-Psalm 127="Children are an heritage of the Lord..." If that is true, why does He not prevent their death? This passage says children are four things: (a) Vs 3=A heritage, (b) vs 3=A reward, (c) vs 4=Our strength, and (d) vs 5=Our joy. Again, if so, how can He allow them to die? (a) They are a heritage no matter the length of their earthly life; would we have chosen not to have had them at all? "Better to have loved and lost than to never loved at all." (b) The "fruit of the womb is his reward;" again, no matter how short or long the earthly life. Do we deny the joy of that fruit, even though we enjoyed it for such a short time? The author asked a new grandfather recently about his new grandchild. The grandfather, a Christian psychotherapist, replied, "When God wanted to make something which produces sheer joy, He created a grandchild." That is, and will be, true, no matter how long the child lives. (c) They continue to be our reward, even if removed to heaven; we are richer---and much more so---because they came to us. (d) And they are our joy, as well as being our reward, even though they are now in God's presence. Will heaven be a lesser experience because they have preceded us? Because they are with God does not mean that they are not now, at the same time, with us. See *We Are Seven* by Wordsworth, p. 114

4. THE QUIET SERVANT: DORCAS-Acts 9:36-42. I. Vs 36-Note her *service*; her good works are "alms-deeds." II. Note her *sympathy* expressed in her service to the widows of her day. III. Note her *simplicity*; with little but a needle and a willing heart, she found her rich place of kindly service. IV. Note her *suffering*; she was "sick and died" (vs 36) although a faithful servant of the Lord. V. Note her *significance*; not only was she sorely missed in her own day, she would be amazed that two thousand years after her earthly life ended, she is sufficiently significant that we are speaking of her today. VI. Note her *soul-winning*; many believed (vs 42). She was "presented alive" (v 41), but later, she was "presented dead" again. Following her second tour on earth, she was "present alive" forever in heaven, even as we shall be.

5. THE STRAIT PLACE-Philippians 1:23="For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better..." This "squeeze," ("strait" meaning a narrow place) unlike many others, is pleasant. "Desire" (*epithumia*) is a very strong word, expressing excitement, passion, etc. "Depart" (*analsis*) speaks of unloading a tired animal at the end of a day's work, to strike a tent, to untie a boat from its moorings preparatory to moving out to the open sea, etc. "With Christ" is the ultimate hope of all Christians. Not "better," but "far better!" The Greek has a strong phrase "*pollo mallon*," very much more. Why is it better? How is it better? What label would the secular psychotherapist attach to a person who expressed a desire to die?

6. SERVING MY DAY-Acts 13:36="For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption." I. David served; good men do. II. He served his own generation; many don't. No man can serve any other generation if he doesn't serve his own. If he serves his own, he will infallibly serve others. Somebody has called that fact "the scandal of particularity," that is, we are forced, in the very nature of the case, to serve some particular time and place and circumstance. "Think globally; act locally." III. David served "by the will of God," that is, according to God's purposes for his life. Again, obviously, everybody does not do so. In fact, the man who does is a rare individual. IV. David "fell on sleep," that is, he died. The statistics are impressive: one out of one dies, whether prince or pauper. David was a king but did not escape the inevitable. The New England Primer, illustrating the use of the letter "X" says: "Xerxes did die; And so must I." V. David was gathered to his clan after death, life's ultimate blessing is to be a part of the community of faith forever. See the song "When The Saints Go Marching In." Who is he with now?

7. THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN-PROVERBS 31:10-31=Here is a beautiful picture of an industrious woman with a true servant's heart. "Her children rise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." She "made her mark" on the world by serving others. Lamentably, too many children rise up very belatedly to "call her blessed!" Better late than never. Note the emphasis and de-emphasis in the passage on physical beauty. Only one beauty contest is mentioned in the Bible and that one, in which Esther plays a prominent role, was produced by a pagan king. See, for contrast, I Peter 3:1-7.

8. MINISTRY AFTER THE FUNERAL-Ezekiel 24:15-18. A strange story: God takes away the prophet's wife with a "stroke," and then he immediately returns to his God-assigned task. The story is a sign to Israel (vss 19-24) and to us. It says: I. God knows the days of our lives; our times are in His hand (Psalm 90:12). See "Appointment at Samarra," p. 140. II. Obedience to God does not prevent tragedies; evidently both prophet and wife were obedient servants of God. Hebrews 11 comprises a list of men and women who served God faithfully, even heroically, yet who suffered and died. Jesus came to the house of Mary and Martha and yet death occurred there. The prophet does not ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" III. God's timing in all things is best, whether we know it or not. Surely the prophet did not think so any more than we do at times. IV. In any case, the only wise response following traumatic experiences, is to immediately take up our God-assigned task again, as the prophet did. His wife would have surely encouraged him to do

so. He acted in a callous and unfeeling manner only if God had not given him freedom to do what he did. See Jesus, particularly following the transfiguration experience, after which He, upon the heels of that marvelous revelation of heaven, ministers to a needy child at the foot of the mountain. (Luke 9:37f) See also the disciples, upon John's death, immediately entering into a heavy time of ministry. (Matthew 14:13-36)

9. WHEN DEATH IS PRECIOUS-Psalm 116:15. The worldling would never label death as being "precious," but God does in our text. How is it precious? I. Because the battle is over; no more struggles. II. Because the ministry is completed; we can say with our Lord "it is finished." III. Because the testimony is established, and it is established forever. IV. Because the pain has ended; no pain-killers in heaven. V. Because the devil is defeated. He won a few skirmishes, but the big battle is done and he is vanquished forever. VI. Because hope has become sight. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24) VII. Because the child is home. The believer is first, and foremost, His *child*. It must be remembered, however, that all this is true for the believer, not the unbeliever. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10)

10. HOPE-I Peter 1:3. Hope is to the life what air is to the lungs, what light is to the eyes, what sound is to the ear. Our lives simply cannot function properly without it. The big question is: "Is there any hope." "Hopeless" is one of the most haunting words in the English language. Sometimes, when hope is deferred, we "hope against hope," and find, happily, that "hope springs eternal in the human breast," as Alexander Pope said. Alas, the poet adds, perhaps wistfully: "Man never is, but always to be, blest," as if the objects of our hope forever elude us. Every human knows the agony of failing hopes and the ecstasy of fulfilled hopes. With Christians, there is (1) 1:3-A VITAL HOPE, i.e., it dramatically affects life and the assurance of its power to do so is based on God's being able to raise Christ from the dead, (2) 2:13- A VISIONARY HOPE, i.e., it sees the "end" (ultimate purpose) of "grace," that is, all the glory that is to be brought to us at Christ's second coming, (3) 1:18-21-A VICTORIOUS HOPE, that is, it is in God, not man, or human institutions. "My hope is build on nothing less..." (Note, again, Peter emphasises Christ's resurrection and ascension.) And (4) 3:13-15-IT IS A HOPE THAT IS VOCAL. Let every child of God be prepared for all who ask of the hope that is within him. And to do so gladly!

Some years ago I penned these lines, based on the famous "love" passage in Paul's Corinthian correspondence:

When shines upon us heaven's light,
Faith will die, becoming sight;
Hope will fade, holding all things fast,
Love and love alone will forever last.

But until then, let us have hope!

THE USE OF POETRY IN FUNERALS

One of the most characteristic facets of funerals in the English-speaking world, along with the use of scripture and music, is the use of poetry---which, of course, is closely akin to scripture and music. The same holds true, with the necessary changes, in all cultures. Each has its “scriptures,” music, and poetry. Thomas Mann once said, “Without death there would scarcely have been poets on earth.” It is one of the most prominent themes, clearly, of bards throughout history.

Poetry possesses a capacity for profundity of thought and expression which is, oftentimes, uniquely suited for the funeral occasion. Sometimes a funeral is made forever memorable solely by a brief quotation of a line or two of poetry. One thinks of Robert Browning’s “fog in my throat,” of Edwin Markham’s line about Lincoln’s death being like a “lordly cedar” falling and “leaving a lonely place against the sky,” of Lincoln’s favorite line, written by William Knox, “Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?” and the line from John Donne (the quintessential “death” poet), “Death be not proud...”. There is also Alan Seeger’s memorable, “I have a rendezvous with death...,” and James Russell Lowell’s “...and, behind the great unknown, standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own,” etc. Such lines powerfully communicate the incommunicable---the profundity of the experience of mortality.

Dangers, however exist (abound!) in the funereal use of poetry.

1. The poem ought, obviously, to fit the occasion.
2. Poetry with obtuse words, lines, allusions, etc., should be avoided.
3. Poetry that is maudlin, because it trivializes the occasion, must be shunned.
4. Short, rather than long, portions are more suitable, except on rare occasions. (One thinks of Wordsworth’s *We Are Seven*, which, while a bit long, fits the occasion of the burial of an infant well. Too, James Weldon Johnson’s poignant *Go Down Death* also comes to mind.)
5. Poetry which does not espouse a clear-cut Biblical theology must not be used. Kipling’s *L’Envoi*, while beautifully expressive of the activity of heaven, promises that all who are good will be happy; Taylor’s *About Ben Adhem* assures us that, if we love our fellow-man, we will thereby be credited in the next world with having loved the Lord; Bryant’s profound *Thanatopsis*---as would be true of much more otherwise beautiful poetry---makes no explicit reference to an authentically scriptural perspective of salvation. But then, poetry with that lack could still be appropriately used if it did not specifically deny the Biblical revelation and was used in conjunction with the more explicit scriptural material.
6. Poetry is most effectively used if committed thoroughly to memory. The general rule regarding poetic materials used in funerals is: little poetry, a bit more personal comment, much scripture.

The same general perspectives would apply, with the necessary changes kept in mind, to the use of prose passages.

FUNERAL POETRY

Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes---
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

From *Aurora Leigh* by Robert Browning; Book VII, Line 820

Let no one till his death
Be called unhappy. Measure not the work
Until the day's out and the labor done.

From *Aurora Leigh* by Robert Browning, Book V, Line 76

Oh, how glorious and resplendent,
Fragile body, thou shalt be,
When endued with so much beauty;
Full of health, strong and free.
Full of vigor, full of pleasure,
Thou shalt last for eternity.

Now with gladness, now with courage,
Bear the burdens on thee laid,
That hereafter these thy labors
May with endless gifts be paid,
And in everlasting glory
Thou with brightness be arrayed.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

One day at a time, with its failures and fears,
With its hurts and mistakes, with its weakness
and tears,
With its portion of pain and its burden of care;
One day at a time we must meet and must bear.

One day at a time---but the day is so long,
And the heart is not brave and the soul is not strong.
O Thou pitiful Christ, be Thou near all the way;
Give courage and patience and strength for the day.

Swift cometh His answer, so clear and so sweet;
“Yeah, I will be with thee, thy troubles to meet;
I will not forget thee, nor fail thee, nor grieve;
I will not forsake thee; I will not leave.

Not yesterday’s load we are called on to bear,
Nor the morrow’s uncertain and shadowy care;
Why should we look forward or back with dismay?
Our needs, as our mercies, are but for the day.

Author unknown

WHY SHOULD THE SPIRIT OF MORTAL BE PROUD?

Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall moulder to dust and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved;
The mother that infant’s affection who proved;
The husband that mother and infant who blessed,
Each, all, are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose
eye;
Shone beauty and pleasure,---her triumphs are by;

And the memory of those who loved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the sceptre hath borne;
The brow of the priest that the mitre hath worn;
The eye of the sage and heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depth of the grave.

The peasant whose lot was to sow and to reap;
The herdsman, who climbed with his goats up the
steep;
The beggar, who wandered in search of his break,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint who enjoyed the communion of heaven,
The sinner who dared to remain unforgiven,
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes, like the flower or the weed
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes, even those we behold;
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

For we are the same our fathers have been;
We see the same sights our fathers have seen,---
We drink the same stream and view the same sun,
And run the same course our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking our fathers would
shrink;
To the life we are clinging they also would cling;
But it speeds for us all, like a bird on the wing.

They loved, but the story we cannot unfold;
They scorned, but the heart of the haughty is cold;
They grieved, but no wail from their slumbers will
come;
They joyed, but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died, ay! they died: and we things that are now,
Who walk in the turf that lies over their brow,
Who make in their dwelling a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage
road.

Yea! hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
We mingle together in sunshine and rain;
And the smiles and the tears, the song and the dirge,
Shall follow each other, like surge upon surge.
'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud,---
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

This poem, written by William Knox, would not be rated as excellent poetry, but it is special because it was the favorite poem of Abraham Lincoln, an avid reader of poetry who could quote---and often did---long passages from the Biblical authors and Shakespeare, among others. Apparently, Lincoln never knew who wrote it. A book, comprised only of this short poem, and published in 1877, is one of the author's most prized possessions.

THE ROSE STILL GROWS BEYOND THE WALL

Near a shady wall a rose once grew,
Budded and blossomed in God's free light;
Watered and fed by morning dew,
Shedding its sweetness day and night.

As it grew and blossomed fair and tall,
Slowly rising to loftier height,
It came to a crevice in the wall
Through which there shone a beam of light.

Onward it crept with added strength,
With never a thought of fear or pride;
It followed the light through the crevice-length,
And unfolded itself on the other side.

Shall claim of death cause us to grieve,
And make our courage faint or fall?
Nay, let us faith and hope receive,---
The rose still grows beyond the wall,---

Scattering fragrance far and wide,
Just as it did in days of yore;
Just as it did on the other side;
Just as it will forevermore.

A. L. Frink

THE PSYCHOLOGIST

He takes the saints to pieces,
And labels all the parts,
He tabulates the secrets
Of loyal loving hearts.
He probes their selfless passion,
And shows exactly why
The Martyr goes out singing,
To suffer and to die.
The beatific vision
That brings them to their knees
He smilingly reduces
To infant fantasies.
The Freudian unconscious
Quite easily explains
The splendor of their sorrows,
The pageant of their pains.
The manifold temptations,
Wherewith the soul can vex
The saintly soul, are samples
Of Oedipus complex.
The subtle sex perversion,
His eagle glance can tell,
That makes their joyous heaven

The horror of their hell.
His reasoning is perfect,
His proofs as plain as paint,
He has but one small weakness,
He cannot make a saint.

G. A. Studdert-Kennedy

CROSSING THE BAR

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
To full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark.

For tho' from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

Alfred Lord Tennyson

I SHALL NOT PASS THIS WAY AGAIN

I love the beauty of the scene,
Would roam again o'er fields so green:

But since I may not, let me spend
My strength for others to the end,---
For those who tread on rock and stone,
And bear their burdens all alone,
Who loiter not in leafy bowers,
Nor hear the birds nor pluck the flowers,
A larger kindness give to me,
A deeper love and sympathy;
 Then, O, one day
 May someone say---
Remembering a lessened pain---
“Would she could pass this way again.”

Eva Rose York

L' ENVOI

When earth's last picture is painted. and the tubes are
 twisted and dried,
When the oldest colors have faded, and the youngest
 critic has died,
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it---lie down for
 an aeon or two,
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to work
 anew!

And those that were good will be happy: they shall sit in
 a golden chair;
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes of
 comet's hair;
They shall find real saints to draw from---Magdalene and
 Peter and Paul;
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired
 at all!

And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master
 shall blame;
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work

for fame;
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his
separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things
as They Are!

Rudyard Kipling

REQUIEM

Under the wide and starry sky
Dig me a grave and let me lie;
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he long'd to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

Robert Louis Stevenson

I HAVE A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade
When Spring comes round with rustling shade
And apple blossoms fill the air.
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath;
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death

On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow of flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear...
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

Alan Seeger

LINCOLN, THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE

So, when the Captain came with the mighty heart;
And when the judgment thunders split the house,
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again
The rafters of the Home. He held his place---
Held the long purpose like a growing tree---
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

From *Lincoln, The Man of the People* by Edwin Markham

Oh, may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better to their presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity,

In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge men's search
To vaster issues. So to live is heaven:
To make undying music in the world.

From *The Choir Invisible* by George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Awaits alike the inevitable hour;
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,
If memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire:
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre;

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
The village tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute, inglorious Milton, here may rest;
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

From *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Gray

William Wordsworth asks, "Who is the happy warrior, and who is it that every man should wish to be?" In the closing lines of his *Character of the Happy Warrior*, he says it is finally the man

Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
Forever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead unprofitable name---
Finds comfort in himself and in his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause;
This is the happy Warrior; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the
Word;
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim
unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his
own.

From *The Present Crisis* by James Russell Lowell

So live that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take

His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

From *Thanatopsis* by William Cullen Bryant

ABOU BEN ADHEM

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An Angel writing in a book of gold:
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Presence in the room he said,
“What writest thou?” The Vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord
Answered, “The name of those who love the Lord.”
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low
But cheerily still, and said, “I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men.”

The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God has blessed,
And, lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest!

James Henry Leigh Hunt

COURAGEOUS FRIEND

If all the music died

And music makers ceased.
I think you'd stand and sing
A hymn of hope and peace.

If nights of doubt and fear
Against the light were hurled,
I think you'd light a candle
And stand against the world.

If winds of changing times
Uprooted trees and sod,
I think instead of mocking
You'd stand in praise of God.

The beauty of your life
Is like a work of art
Inscribed by memory's hand
Upon my grateful heart.

Perry Tankersley

WE ARE SEVEN

A Simple Child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
Her beauty made me glad.

“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?”
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-year lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet you are seven!--I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive,
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then yhe are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s
door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sunset, Sir,
When it is light and fair,”
I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

“The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

“So in the church-yard she was laid;
And when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If two of you are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O, Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!”
‘Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

William Wordsworth

And does with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke. Why swell’st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!
From *Death*, Be Not Proud by John Donne

All the great things of life are swiftly done,
Creation, death, and love the double gate.
However much we dawdle in the sun
We have to hurry at the touch of Fate;
When Life knocks at the door no one can wait,
When Death makes his arrest we have to go.

From *The Widow* in the Bye Street, John Masefield

I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.

From *Past and Present* by Thomas Hood

Before thy mystic altar, heavenly truth,
I kneel in manhood as I knelt in youth.
Thus let me kneel, till this dull form decay
And life's last shade be brightened by thy ray.

Sir William James

To an open house in the evening,
Home shall men come,

To an older place than Eden,
And a taller town than Rome,
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless,
And all men are at home.

Home At Last by Gilbert K. Chesterton

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

From To A Waterfowl by William Cullen Bryant

Warm summer sun, shine kindly here,
Warm southern wind, blow softly here,
Green sod above, be light, be light,
Good night, little one, Good night.

Epitaph for Mrs. Mark Twain

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, balk, and sear;
A lily of a day
Is fairer far, in May.

Although it fall and die that night,
It was a plant and flower of Light.
In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measures life may perfect be.

From a Pindaric ode translated by Ben Jonson

Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade,
Death came with friendly care;
The opening bud to heaven conveyed,
And bade it blossom there.

From *Epitaph on an Infant* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

I have a little brother,
His age I cannot tell;
For they number not in days and years
Where he has gone to dwell.

Author unknown

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be.
The last of life, for which the first was made;
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be
afraid."

All that is at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
Which entereth into thee,

That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: potter and clay
endure.

So, take and use thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past
the aim!
My times be in thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete
the same!

From *Rabbi Ben Ezra* by Robert Browning

The stars shine over the earth,
The stars shine over the sea,
The stars look up to the mighty God,
The stars look down on me;
The stars will live for a million years,
For a million years and a day,
But Christ and I shall live and love
When the stars have passed away.

Anonymous

He Leadeth Me

He leadeth me! O blessed tho't! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me!

Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom, sometimes where Eden's
bowers bloom,
By waters still, o'er troubled sea, still 'tis his hand that leadeth me!

Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine, nor ever murmur nor repine,
Content, whatever lot I see, since 'tis Thy hand that leadeth me!

And when my task on earth is done, when, by Thy grace, the vict'ry's
won,
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee, since God thro' Jordan leadeth me!

Joseph Gilmore

The bride eyes not her garments,
But her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze on glory,
But on my king of grace;

Not on the crown he gives,
But on his pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
In Immanuel's land.

From *The Sands of Time are Sinking* by Mrs. A. R. Cousin

How beautiful it is for a man to die
Upon the walls of Zion! To be called
Like a watch-worn and weary sentinel;
To put his armor off and rest--in heaven.

Nathaniel Willis

I think that life has spared those mortals much--
And cheated them of more--who have not kept
A breathless vigil by the little bed
Of some beloved child.

From *Vigil* by Faith Baldwin

Death can hide, but not divide.
She's but on Christ's other side.
She is with Christ and Christ is with me.
United in Christ still are we.

One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er:
I am nearer home today
Than ever have been before.

Phoebe Cary

Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavor;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe when men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Rupert Brooke

But just think of stepping on shore and finding it heaven!
Of touching a hand and finding it God's!
Of breathing new air and finding it celestial!
Of waking up in glory and finding it home!

The chorus from *Finally Home*, L. E. Singer

LET ME DIE, WORKING

Let me die, working.
Still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone!
Clean to its end, swift may my race be run.
No laggard steps, no faltering, no shirking;
Let me die, working!

Let me die, thinking.

Let me fare forth still with an open mind,
Fresh secrets to unfold, new truths to find,
My soul undimmed, alert, no question blinking;
Let me die, thinking!

Let me die, laughing.

No sighing o'er past sins; they are forgiven
Sealed on this earth are all the joys of heaven;
The wine of life, the cup of mirth quaffing.
Let me die, laughing!

Let me die, helping.

My spirit willing and my soul daring,
My hand extended and my heart caring,
The icy-cold of unconcern melting;
Let me die, helping!

All but the final stanza from S. Hall Young.

Death's flood hath lost its chill
Since Jesus crossed the river.
Lover of souls, from ill
My passing soul deliver.

Anonymous

This is the death of death, to breathe away a breath
And know the end of strife, the taste of deathless life.

Maltbie Babcock

Of all the languages of earth in which
the human kind confer,

The Master Speaker is the Tear: it is the
Great Interpreter.

From *The Conclusion of the Whole Matter* by Ridgley Torrence

She has seen the mystery hid
Under Egypt's pyramid;
By those eyelids pale and close,
Now she knows what Rhamses knows.

From *Little Mattie* by Elizabeth B. Browning

Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine thro' the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks and earth's vain
 shadows flee!
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

From *Abide with Me* by Henry Lyte

After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further.

From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

Our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still like muffled drums are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

From *A Psalm of Life*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Xerxes the Great did die;
And so must you and I.

From *The New England Primer*

There was a very cautious man
Who never romped or played.
One day he passed away and
His insurance was denied.
For, since he never lived, they said,
He never could have died.

Anonymous

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

From *On His Seventh-Fifth Birthday* by Walter Savage Landor

The old order changeth, yielding place to the new,
And God fulfills himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

From *Morte D' Arthur* by Alfred Lord Tennyson

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness...

From *Endymion* by John Keats

Farewell dear child, thou ne'er shall come to me,
But yet awhile, and I shall go to thee;
Meantime my throbbing heart's cheered up with this:
Thou with my Saviour art in endless bliss.

From *In Memory of My Dear Grandchild* by Anne Bradstreet

HE MAKETH NO MISTAKE

My Father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I'm glad to know,
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead
For He doth know the way.

Tho' night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;

But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift,
And plain it all He'll make.
Through all the way, tho' dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

A. M. Overton

Though long and hard be the test,
Nothing this truth can dim:
He always chooses the very best,
For those who leave the choice to Him.

Anonymous

Though love repine and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply:
"Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die."

Anonymous

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

GO DOWN DEATH

Weep not, weep not,
She is not dead;
She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.
Heart-broken husband---weep no more;
Grief-stricken son---weep no more;
Left-lonesome daughter, weep no more;
She's only just gone home.

Day before yesterday morning,
God was looking down from his great, high heaven,
Looking down on all his children,
And his eye fell on Sister Caroline,
Tossing on her bed with pain.
And God's big heart was touched with pity,
With the everlasting pity.

And God sat back on his throne,
And he commanded that tall, bright angel standing
 on his right hand:
Call me Death!
And that tall, bright angel cried in a voice
That broke like a clap of thunder:
Call Death!---Call Death!
And the echo sounded down the streets of heaven
Till it reached away back to that shadowy place,
Where Death waits on his pale, white horses.

And Death heard the summons,
And he leaped on his fastest horse,
Pale as a sheet in the moonlight.
Up the golden street Death galloped,
And the hoofs of his horse struck fire from the gold.

But they didn't make no sound.
Up Death rode to the Great White Throne,
And waited for God's command.

And God said: Go down, Death, go down,
Go down to Savannah, Georgia,
Down in Yamacraw,
And find sister Caroline.
She's borne the burden and heat of the day,
She's labored long in the vineyard,
And she's tired---
And she's weary---
Go down, Death, and bring her to me.

And Death didn't say a word,
But he loosed the reins on his pale, white, horse,
And he clamped the spurs to his bloodless sides,
And out and down he rode,
Through heaven's pearly gates,
Past suns and moons and stars;
On Death rode,
Leaving the lightning's flash behind;
Straight on down he came.

While we were watching round her bed,
She turned her eyes and looked away,
And saw what we couldn't see;
She saw Old Death. She saw Old Death
Coming like a falling star.
But Death didn't frighten Sister Caroline;
He looked to her like a welcome friend,
And she whispered to us: I'm going home,
And she smiled and closed her eyes.
And Death took her up like a baby,
And she lay in his icy arms,
But she didn't feel no chil.
And Death began to ride again---
Up beyond the evening star,
Out beyond the morning star,
Into the glittering light of glory,

On the the Great White Throne.
And there he laid Sister Caroline
On the loving breast of Jesus.

And Jesus took his own hand and wiped away her
tears,
And he smoothed the furrows from her face,
And the angel sang a little song,
And Jesus rocked her in his arms,
And kept a-saying; Take your rest,
Take your rest, take your rest.

Weep not---weep not,
She is not dead;
She's resting in the bosom of Jesus.

James Weldon Johnson

For then the One Great Scorer comes
To write against your name---
He marks---not that you won or lost---
But how you played the game.

From *Alumnus Football* by Grantland Rice

I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death,
His mercy underlies:

And so beside the Silent Sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from Him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands life

Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

From *The Eternal Goodness* by John Greenleaf Whittier

Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment
That was known as Camelot.

From the musical *Camelot* by Fredrick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways---
I to die, and you to live, which is the best God only knows.

Socrates; quoted in Plato: *The Republic and Other Works*, Anchor
Books, Garden City, N. Y., 1973, p. 470

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

A.E. Housman, *To An Athlete Dying Young*

DEATH PERSPECTIVES

Death Perspectives

“We are but tenants, and shortly the great Landlord will give us notice that our lease has expired.” (Joseph Jefferson)

“Only one life; ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” (Anonymous)

“And nothing ‘gainst Time’s scythe can make defense...” (William Shakespeare)

When John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew he were to die that night, he said the he would eat his supper, preach at candlelight, say his prayers and go to bed.

Lowell Davis of the small town of Savannah, Missouri, has been writing down the names of everybody he’s met for the last eighty years. With the help of his wife, he has written down the names of 3,487 different persons. He, obviously, does not remember all the persons those names represent, but God knows all the 3,487---and everybody else’s who ever lived!

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the (funeral) bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” (John Donne; quoted in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, Thirteenth edition, Little Brown, and Company, 1955, Boston, p. 218)

If anything is (to the primitive) in need of proof, it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death.” (Sir James Fraser, *The Golden Bough*, Mentor Books, 1959, p. 337)

“*Psychology Today* polled its half-million North American readers asking them what they want more than

anything else. Like the rich young ruler, they replied that they wanted the assurance of eternal life. A Russian teenager emerged from tests as one of 2,000 best brains in the Soviet Union. Her IQ was near 200. So she was extended the honor of having a 'letter to the editor' published in PRAVDA---a letter in which she asked the scientists of world socialism, with their pills for nearly everything else, to produce a pill for immortality. A team of psychiatrists in Missouri came to the conclusion, on the basis of tests that indicate what goes on under the skin and inside the skulls of Americans---at all ages---that people think and feel four and a half times as much about how to solve the riddle of death and what comes after it as about sex and romance." (*WW III*, John Wesley White, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977, p. 202)

"One of the Greek myths is about Aurora, the goddess of dawn, who fell in love with Tithonus, a mortal youth. Zeus offered her any gift she might choose for her mortal lover. She asked that Tithonus might never die, but she forgot to ask that he might remain forever young. So Tithonus lived forever growing older and older and more decrepit till life became a terrible and intolerable curse." (William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1974, p. 41)

"God buries his workmen, but carries on his work." (Inscribed on the monument to the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, in Westminster Abbey, London.)

"Through many of the brilliant lines of his (Shakespeare's) work runs one 'theme': Shakespeare's profound melancholy, his constant awareness of the inevitability of death, which conquers love and beauty and all desire in the end---and the end is never far away."

"I have two questions about religion: Did anybody ever conquer death and did he make a way for me to do it?" (Canadian scientist G. B. Hardy)

G. K. Chesterton, the celebrated English writer, once contrasted the joy of Christians and non-Christians. He said that the pagans are joyful about the little things but sad about the big things. The Christians, on the other hand, Chesterton said, are sometimes sad about little things, but are always glad about the big things.

The eminent clergymn Henry Ward Beecher once said he never knew but two men who boasted that so far as they knew, they had never shed a tear. Beecher said that one of them died in a lunatic asylum and the other spent his life in a penitentiary.

“Christ turned a brilliant guess into a solid certainty and endowed the hope of eternal life with grace, reason, and majesty.” (Hugh Elmer Brown)

A soldier, during the last moments of his life in a German prison cell, wrote these words on his cell wall: “I believe in the Sun, even when it is not shining. I believe in love, even when I do not feel it. I believe in God, even when He is silent.”

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal....Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” (C. S. Lewis)

“Life on this planet is like a train plunging at full speed through the night, with a slain conductor in the cab. The train is the world; we are the freight; fate is the track; death is the darkness. God is the engineer---who is dead.” (James Leo Green, *God Reigns*, Broadman Publishing Co., Nashville, TN, nd, p. 147)

When Socrates was told that he ought to prepare for death, he answered, “Do you not know that I have been preparing for death all my life?”

“Death is the supreme festival on the road to freedom.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

“We all labor against our own cure, for death is the cure of all diseases.” (Sir Thomas Brown)

“Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily.” (La Rouchefoucauld)

“If I thought I was going to die tomorrow, I’d plant a tree today.” (Stephen Girard)

Some Eskimos turn out their elderly to freeze simply because they represent an economic drain on the entire tribe and cannot be dragged along on the hunts. Some members of a Pacific tribe compel their elderly to climb a tree and be shaken down to their death, or to climb a cliff and jump off. The practice is based on a belief that persons live through eternity at the death-age. To live beyond one’s active years is to condemn one to live forever in a weakened, even decrepit state.

“Psychology Today for June, 1971, polls its half million readers and reveals that a majority of Americans actually ‘yearn’ for eternal life, just as did the rich young ruler.” (J. W. White, *Re-entry*, Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, p. 26)

“I am standing upon a seashore; a ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and the sky come down to mingle with each other. Then someone at my side says, ‘There! She’s gone!’

Gone where? Gone from my sight---that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her, and just at the moment when someone at my side says, ‘There! She’s gone!’---there are other eyes watching her coming and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, ‘There she comes!’ And that is dying!” (Author unknown)

The Egyptians say: “Prepare for the judgments of Osiris by observing the rules of right conduct.”

The Norsemen say: “Fight a good fight and save yourselves so that you may enter into the halls of Valhalla.”

Confucius said: “Walk in the trodden paths; be a good citizen of the celestial empire.”

Buddha said: “Henceforth be your own light, your own refuge, and seek no other.”

The Bible says: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:9-13)

"A miracle in our time: to reach old age and be noble." (Juvenal)

Lloyd C. Douglas once asked an old philosopher, "What is the good news today?" Perceiving that Douglas was serious, the old philosopher took a small mallet and struck a metal device hanging from a thread. Turning to Douglas, he said, "That's the good news for today. That, my friend, is A. It was A all day yesterday. It will be A all day today, next week, a thousand years from now. The soprano next door warbles abominably, and the tenor over yonder faults unspeakably, and the piano across the hall is out of tune. But that, dear friend, is an A. That's the good news."

"We'll sing a double anthem when the Lord takes us home. Elijah's crowd is going to sing, 'O, death, where is thy sting,' and Moses' crowd is going to sing, 'O, grave, where is thy victory,' and then all of us are going to join in on the chorus." (S. M. Lockridge)

Two Christian men were vacationing in the Welsh mountains. They met a simple and undeducated shepherd boy tending sheep. They spoke to him of the gospel and, as they parted, they told him to remember a five-word phrase from the famed "Shepherd Psalm:" The Lord is my shepherd...." They told the rustic lad that he could remember the words by allowing each finger of one of his hands to represent each of the words, the thumb representing the word "the," the first finger representing "Lord," and so on out to the smallest finger.

The following year, the men were hiking in the same area and stopped at an humble Welsh cottage for refreshment. They noticed a picture of a Welsh lad whom they recognized as the shepherd boy whom they had met earlier. Upon inquiry, they learned that he was, indeed, the same boy, but that, tragically, he had been killed when he fell off a cliff in a winter storm. They told the boy's family of their visit with him, and

of their sharing the gospel with him.

The boy's mother thought that, just maybe, the men could explain the strange fact that, upon discovering the boy's body, the rescuers found the boy to be firmly gripping, with his right hand, his fourth finger, the ring finger, on his left hand. The men knew, of course, what that meant: the lad had remembered the men's advice and was indicating, in the final moments of his life, that he was truly trusting Christ as "*MY*" shepherd.

"Our lease on life is frighteningly brief; we are poor tenant farmers, scrabble poor, who live daily, hourly, on the verge of being evicted. Presently the great Landlord comes and tells us that we must move on." (Author unknown)

C. E. M. Joad, the English philosopher, said that if he could speak to but one person who ever lived, it would be Jesus of Nazareth, and if he could ask but one question of Jesus, it would be, "Did you or did you not rise from the dead?" That matter, he said, when all its ramifications are considered, is the most important subject of discussion on the planet.

A geology professor once asked his class to name the most valuable thing that comes out of a mine. After listing several minerals and metals, the professor told the class that all their answers were wrong. The most valuable thing that comes out of a mine, said the professor, is a miner.

Sir Walter Scott once said, "There is no life of a man, faithfully recorded, but it is a heroic poem of its own sort, rhymed or unrhymed."

An American journalist once said that he had set high on his personal rules for his life never to allow himself to think about death.

In a biographical comment about a well-known medical doctor, an author said "He takes death personally." Indeed! All human beings will one day.

In a little country church, the lights went off one night while the pastor was preaching. A hush fell over the room and then, suddenly, out of the darkness came these words: "Preach on, brother; we can see Jesus in the dark."

"Many psychologists agree...about man's fear of non-being. Herman Feifel writes: 'Gregory Zilboorg, a noted psychiatrist, has stated that the fear of death is present in our mental functioning at all times.' Melanie Klein, the English psychoanalyst, believed that fear of death is at the root of all human anxiety. Paul Tillich, the renowned theologian, bases his theory of anxiety on the orientation that man is finite and must die. The Austrian psychiatrist, William Stekel, went so far as to express the hypothesis that every fear we have is ultimately fear of death!" (From "Death," Encyclopedia of Mental Health, Vol. 2, p. 438, quoted by Akbar Abdul-Haqq, One Race, One Gospel, One Task, ed., Carl F. Henry and Stanley Mooneyham, *World Wide Publications*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1967, p. 104)

Herman Feifel says, "Even psychiatrists seem reluctant to talk or write about death. And in the textbooks of psychology, there is not a paragraph on the topic of death." Later he says, after having done a study on the views of medical doctors about death---their own death: "Provocative, nevertheless, is the additional finding that the physician group is more *afraid* of death than either the patients or normal subjects." (Ibid., p. 104)

D. L. Moody once said that some day people would read that D. L. Moody of East Northfield had died. "Don't believe a word of it," he said, "because at that moment I shall be more alive than I am now...I was born in the flesh in 1837. I was born of the spirit in 1856. That which is born of flesh may die. That which is born of the spirit will live forever."

Two caterpillars philosophized about life. One day they talked about what heaven would be like. They concluded that, more than likely, heaven was a place with bigger and better cabbages to chew on. One of their kind, overhearing the conversation, said, "I have a hunch that one day I'm going to have wings and fly above all this and sip dew and honey out of those beautiful blossoms on yonder fence." His friends thought his idea was preposterous and was evidence that he had taken leave of his caterpillar senses. One day the dreamer died and his friends wrapped him in a shroud which they called a chrysalis, hung him on a nearby twig, and grieved over the loss of their friend whom they loved, despite his being fuzzy in his body as well as in his mind. By and by the grave burst open, the shroud split, and out into the sunlight emerged a moist, trembling, fragile, beautiful butterfly. And when his wings were dry, he fluttered daintily over the fence, alighted in the open face of a Morning Glory and sipped honeyed dew from it. (Author unknown)

“Let us live, and let us love, and let us value the tales of austere old men....The sun sets and returns again, but for us, when once our brief light sets, there is but one perpetual night through which we must sleep.”
(Catullus)

“Man always lives in the conscious or unconscious anxiety of having to die. Non-being is present in every moment of his being. Suffering, accidents, disease, loss of relations to nature and man, loneliness, insecurity, weakness, error are always with him. Finally, the threat of having to die will become the reality of death.”
(Paul Tillich, *The Theology of Pastoral Psychology*, X, October, 1959, p. 23)

A small black-domed chapel stands between the crest of the Mount of Olives and the Valley of Kidron near Jerusalem. The Latin words, “Dominus Flevit” (“ the Lord wept”) are inscribed upon it. It is commonly supposed that it was on that spot where Jesus did, indeed, weep as he attended the funeral of Lazarus. (See John 11:35)

There was once a sign at Gibraltar with the words “Ne Plus Ultra” (“nothing beyond”) on it. That sign was placed there before the “new world” was discovered to the west. With the discovery of lands west of Gibraltar, the sign was changed by eradicating the “Ne,” leaving the sign to read “Plus Ultra,” i. e., “everything beyond!” Before Jesus arose, there was “nothing” beyond the grave; now we know that, comparatively, everything is beyond the grave.

In a village cemetery in Gaaden, Austria, a tombstone has a one-word epitaph, the German word “warum,” which translated into English is “why?”

Ralph Waldo Emerson was once accosted by a woman who said, “Dr. Emerson, do you not know that the world is coming to an end on October fourteenth of this year?” Dr. Emerson calmly replied, “Well, let’s just let it go; we can get along without it anyway!”

“If the Father deigns to touch with divine power the cold and pulseless heart of the buried acorn and to

make it burst forth from its prison walls, will He leave neglected in the earth the soul of man made in the image of the Creator?" (Wiliam Jennings Bryan)

"I feel my immortality o'ersweep all pains, all tears, all time, all fears, and like the eternal thunder of the deep peal to my ears this truth: "Thou livest forever." (Lord Byron)

"For I never have seen, and never shall see, that the cessation of the evidence of existence is necessarily evidence of the cessation of existence." (William Frennd De Morgan)

Mark Twain once wrote, "Special providence! That phrase nauseates me ---with its implied importance of mankind and triviality of God. In my opinion these myriads of globes are merely the blood corpuscles ebbing and flowing through the arteries of God...and God does not know we are there and would not care if He did." (Halford Luccock, *God and the Individual*, Abingdon, Nashville, Tennessee, 1937, p. 63)

"Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day." (Bertrand Russell)

"Are we to suppose that the soul, which is invisible, in passing to the true Hades, which like her is invisible, and pure, and noble, and on her way to the good and wise God, whither, if God will, my soul is also soon to go,---that the soul, I repeat, if this be her nature and origin, is blown away and perishes immediately on quitting the body, as the many say? That can never be, my dear Simmias and Cebes. The truth rather is, that the soul which is pure at departing draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily had connection with the body, which she is avoiding, herself gathered into herself; for such abstraction has been the study of her life. And what does this mean but that she has been a true disciple of philosophy, and has practiced how to die easily? And is not philosophy the practice of death? (Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, Anchor Books, Garden City, NY, 1973, p. 514)

A seven-year old lad once saw a workman fall off his ladder. People crowded around and, noting the condition of the man, began to weep openly. The boy heard them use the word “dead,” a word unfamiliar to him. The boy told his mother what had happened. In further discussion, his mother finally told him the truth about humanity, and himself: we all have to die someday. The boy, in agitation, told his mother that he wanted to “go back where I started and not go this way any more.”

Appointment at Samarra

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

The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went.

Then the merchant went down to the marketplace and he saw the woman standing in the crowd and he came to her and said, “Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?”

“That was not a threatening gesture,” the woman said, “it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.” (W. Somerset Maugham, 1933, quoted in *Illustrations Unlimited*, James S. Hewett, p. 148)

“High up in the North, in the land called Svithjod, there stands a rock. It is 100 miles high and 100 miles wide. Once every 1000 years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak. When the rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by.” (Hendrik Van Loon *The Story of Mankind*, Boni and Liveright, Inc., New York, 1921, p. 28)

Centuries ago a godly couple were rearing two sons. One day, both sons suddenly died. When the woman’s husband came home, she was waiting and engaged him in a quiet talk. She posed a question: “If somebody gave us a treasured thing to keep for them, would we have to give it back to them upon their request?” “Yes, of course,” came her husband’s reply. She then told her what had happened. Perhaps Job said it first: “The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21)

“My physician tells me that I must die, and I feel that he tells me the truth. In my best hours, and in my worst, death has been perpetually upon my mind: it has covered me like a dread presence, weighed me down like an ocean, blinded me like a horrid vision, imprisoned my faculties as with bars and gates of iron. Often and often, when in saloons alive with mirth and splendor, I have seemed the gayest of the inmates, this thought and fear of death have shot through my mind, and I have turned away sick and shuddering. What is it then to approach the reality? to feel it very near---very close at hand? stealing on, and on, and on, like the tide upon the shore, not to be driven back till it has engulfed its prey? What is it to apprehend the approach of the time when you must be a naked, trembling spirit, all memory, and all consciousness, never again for a single moment to sleep, or know oblivion from the crushing burden of the deeds done in the body!...O, well may I smite upon my breast, and cry, with all but despair, Woe is me for the past! woe, woe, for the past! Every dream is dissolved---every refuge of lies is plucked from me---every human consolation totters beneath me, like a bowing wall: and all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them, could not bribe from my soul the remembrance of a single sin. Ambition, pleasure, fame, friendship, lie around alike wrecks, and my soul is helpless in the midst of them, like a mariner on this wave-worn rock.” (From *New Cyclopaedia of Prose Illustrations*, ed. Elon Foster, Crowell Publishers, 1997)

“Watkinson, the great preacher, tells how once at the seaside, when he was with his little grandson, he met an old minister. The old man was very disgruntled and, to add to all his troubles, he had a slight of sun-stroke. The little boy had been listening but had not picked it up quite correctly; and when they left the grumbling complaints of the old man, he turned to Watkinson and said, ‘Granddad, I hope you never suffer from sunset.’” (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series*, Luke, Westminster Press, 1975, p. 132)

The word “fate” comes from a Latin word *fari*, that is, to speak. When the emperor had spoken, his word became law. In Roman mythology there were three fates,(1) Clotho--who holds the distaff or spindle; (2) Lachesis--who drew out the thread, and (3) Atropos--who snipped it off. These three fates were called “The Three Sisters” and were supposed to control human destiny.

A bishop once lay dying and a friend asked him if he was fearful. He said he was not: “My Father owns the land on both sides of the river,” he quietly said.

“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than 10,000 tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition and of unspeakable love.” (Washington Irving)

The Greek philosopher Diogenes was once asked by Alexander the Great why he was examining a pile of human bones in a cemetery. Diogenes said he was searching for the bones of Alexander's father and could not distinguish between them and the bones of his servants.

The importance of man? Zen Buddhism says, "Man enters the water and causes no ripple."

"We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species....No deity will save us; we must save ourselves." (The Humanist Manifesto)

"That is the worst of those dear people who have charm; they are so terrible to do without, when once you have got accustomed to them and all their ways." (George Du Maurier, *Trilby*)

"Each person is born to one possession which outvalues all the others--his last breath." (Mark Twain)

"In Homer's *Odyssey*, there is a passage in which Ulysses meets Calypso, a sea princess and a child of the gods. Calypso, a divine being, is immortal. She will never die. She is fascinated by Ulysses, never having met a mortal before. As we read on, we come to realize that Calypso envies Ulysses because he will not live forever. His life becomes more full because his time is limited, and what he chooses to do with it represents a real choice." (Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Schocken Books, New York, 1981, p. 69)

"He bowled 300 in 1962." (Epitaph on a grave-marker; quoted in "The Christian Index," news journal of the Georgia Baptist Convention, May 17, 1990, p. 2)

"Only the man who no longer fears death has ceased to be a slave." (Montaigne)

A boy wrote a letter to God which said, "Dear God, what is it like to die? Nobody tells me. I just want to know, I don't want to do it."

“Death is a very dull, dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it.”
(Somerset Maugham)

“In George Seaton’s film *The Proud and the Profane*, the steps of a young nurse are traced to Iwo Jima where her husband has been killed in World War II. She goes to the cemetery where her husband lies buried and turns to the caretaker, a shell-shocked soldier, who had seen her husband die. ‘How did he die?’ she asked. ‘Like an amateur,’ he replies. ‘They teach you how to hurl a grenade and how to fire a mortar, but nobody teaches you how to die. There are no professionals in dying.’” (William Tuck, *Facing Grief and Death*, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1975, p. 11)

John Quincy Adams, aged and decrepit, was stopped by a friend who asked about his condition. Adams responded, “John Quincy Adams today? John Quincy Adams is doing quite well, I thank you. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming quite dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundations. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out, its walls are much shattered, and it trembles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon. But he, himself, is quite well, quite well.”

A college student’s grandmother had recently died. One of his professors, a bit later, lambasted Christianity in one of his lectures. While walking out of the classroom, a fellow classmate said to the student: “Well, he knocked the props from under Christianity today, didn’t he?” The young man quietly answered, “Not really. He has some weighty philosophical arguments, but only when he explains away my grandmother’s life will his arguments convince me.”

“Life goes on...I forget just why.”
(Edna St. Vincent Millay)

The relationship between Abraham Lincoln and Anne Rutledge is debatable, with some of his biographers indicating that they hardly knew each other while others, who knew them both well, indicate that they were verbally engaged to be married and that she was his only true love. “The death of that fair girl shattered Lincoln’s happiness. He threw off his infinite sorrow only by leaping wildly into the political arena.” (William Herndon, quoted in *Abraham Lincoln: A Character Sketch*, R. D. Sheppard, Drake Publishing Co., Chicago, Illinois, 1898, p. 176)

“The night brings out the stars as sorrows show us truth.” (Gamaliel Bailey)

“A dead child knows all that has puzzled the sages.” (Augustine)

A young army inductee, notified that he was leaving immediately for one of the hottest battlefield fronts of World War II, went to church on the last Sunday night before being shipped out. Overwhelmed by the possibility of his own death, at the conclusion of the service, he stood up and blurted out, “Before we leave, will somebody please tell me how to die.”

“Today, if death did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it.” (Millaud, voting for the death of the French King, Louis XVI)

“His religion, at best, is an anxious wish; like that of Rabelais, ‘a great Perhaps.’” (Thomas Carlyle, of Robert Burns)

“(W)hen John Bright (an English politician) sat mourning in his widowed home, Cobden (a colleague) came to comfort him. ‘Bright,’ he said, ‘there are thousands of homes in England at this moment, where wives, mothers and children are dying of hunger. When the first paroxysm of your grief is past, I would advise you to come with me and we will never rest until the Corn Laws are repealed.’ This is real comfort, to know that one’s trouble can be capitalized into usefulness...The most miserable, pitiful, smashed-up life could blossom again if it would only blossom for others.’ (Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service*, London: Student Christian Movement, 1921, p. 132. English “corn laws” dealt with the export and import of grain which often caused dietary havoc in the population.)

This world is like an inn; the world to come is like a home.

Life is a terrible disease---cured only by death.

A distraught woman, having lost her only son, asked her pastor, "Where was God when my son died?" The pastor quietly said, "In the same place He was when His own Son died."

"If love died along with death, this life wouldn't be so hard." (Andrew Vachss, "Sacrifice")

To Mrs. Bixby, Boston, Mass.

Dear Madam,

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of a republic they died to save. I pray that your Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln

(Author's note: actually, Mrs. Bixby had five sons, but only two were killed. Of the other three, two had deserted and one was honorably discharged. That fact does not in any way detract from the profundity of the letter or the merciful motive which produced it.)

A news report appeared on the wire services recently indicating that a woman had not cried for over eighteen years. She was suffering, the doctors say, from a rare condition called Sjorgren's Syndrome which makes it impossible for its victims to shed tears. Others are victimized by emotional Sjorgren's Syndrome.

A businessman and well-known author said he made it a habit, when reflecting on a very important decision in life, to go to a cemetery and sit on a gravestone. It caused him, he said, to have a much clearer perspective on what was really important in life, and what was not.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh once said that it is only when a tree has fallen that one can take the measure of it, and that it is the same with a man.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a great deal about death. Garry Wills has an interesting note about Emerson in his *Lincoln at Gettysburg*: “Emerson’s youth was strongly influenced by an aunt who wore her own shroud while alive and slept in a coffin-bed. Emerson was initiated early into the culture of death.” (*Lincoln at Gettysburg*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992, p. 276.)

“A man said to the universe, ‘Sir, I exist.’ ‘However,’ replied the universe, ‘the fact has not created in me a sense of obligation.’” (Stephen Crane)

“In *Sartor Resartus* the philosopher sits in his high attic at midnight above the roar of the crowded streets. Strange, he reflects, that all around me are those teeming thousands, men being born, men dying, laughing, cursing, hoping, fearing--’but I sit above it all; I am alone with the stars.” That describes all the man-made gods, but not the God of the Bible. (*The Wind of the Spirit*, James Stewart, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1968, p. 82)

Winston Churchill, on the death of his friend and ally Franklin D. Roosevelt: “He died in harness, and we may well say in battle harness, like his soldiers, sailors and airmen who died side by side with ours and carrying out their tasks to the end all over the world. What an enviable death was his.” (Spoken to the House of Commons, April 17, 1945)

ON IMMORTALITY

1. Charles Darwin: "Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be far more perfect than he is now, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other thinking beings are doomed to complete extinction."
2. John Dryden: "The thought of being nothing after death is a burden insupportable to a virtuous man; we naturally aim at happiness and cannot bear to have it confined to our present being."
3. Homer: "'Tis true; 'tis certain; man though dead retains part of himself; the immortal mind remains."
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson: "We are much better believers in immortality than we can give grounds for. The real evidence is too subtle or is higher than we can write down in propositions."
5. Victor Hugo: "Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. The nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies which invite me."
6. Robert Ingersoll: "Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of a wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."
(Robert G. Ingersoll's Complete Lectures,) Regan Publishing Corp., Chicago, 1926, p. 60)
7. Immanuel Kant: "After death the soul possess self-consciousness, otherwise it would be the subject of spiritual death, which has already been disproved. With this self-consciousness necessarily remains personality and the consciousness of personal identity."
8. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken to the soul."
9. Alfred Martin: "To my reason immortality is the only possible solution to the mystery of life."
10. John Milton: "The spirit of man, which God inspired, cannot together perish with this corporeal clod."
11. James Martineau: "We do not believe in immortality because we have proved it, but we forever try to prove it because we believe it."
12. Plato: "There is yet something remaining for the dead, and some far better thing for the good than the evil."
13. Jean Jacques Rousseau: "Not all the subtilties of metaphysics can make me doubt for a moment of the immortality of the soul, and a beneficent providence. I feel it. I believe it. I desire it. I hope for it. And I will defend it to my last breath."

14. Louis Pasteur (at the bedside of his dying daughter): "I know only scientifically determined truth, but I am going to believe what I wish to believe, what I cannot help but believe--I expect to meet this dear child in another world."

15. Joseph Addison:

Whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing for immortality?
'Tis the divinity that stirs within us;
'Tis heaven itself that points out an hereafter,
And intimates eternity to man.

16. James Montgomery: "Beyond this vale of tears, there is life above, unmeasured by the flight of years, and all that life is love."

17. Johann Von Goethe:"Those who hope for no other life are dead even in this."

18. Hugh Elmer Brown: "Christ turned a brilliant guess (regarding immortality) into a solid certainty and endowed the hope of eternal life with grace, reason, and majesty."

19. Malcolm Muggeridge: "It has never been possible for me to persuade myself that the universe could have been created, and we, 'homo sapiens,'so-called, have, generation after generation, somehow made our appearance to sojourn briefly on our tiny earth, solely in order to mount the interminable soap opera, with the same characters and situations endlessly recurring, that we call history. It would be like building a great stadium for a display of tiddly-winks, or a vast opera house for a mouth-organ recital." (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Confessions*, Harper and Row, 1988, p. 146-7)

20. Josephus: "Souls have an immortal vigor. Under the earth are rewards and punishments. The wicked are detained in an everlasting prison. The righteous shall have power to revive and live again. Bodies are indeed corruptible, but should remain exempt from death forever." (Quoted in A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Judson Press, 1906, p. 996.)

21. Seneca: "This life is only prelude to eternity. For that which we call death is but a pause, in truth a progress into life."

22. Mary Wooley:" "Is it reasonable to suppose that the 'accident of death' means an end to the nobler powers? It is far easier for me to believe than not to believe in immortality."

23. Walt Whitman: "I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman....Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me, or of any one else."

24. Dr. Werner Von Braun: "Everything that science has taught me and continues to teach me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace."

25. George Crain Steward: "The belief in the resurrection of Jesus is an act of faith; yes, it is, a faith in the justice, the reasonableness, the goodness, the squareness of the moral universe."

26. Edward Young: "Seems it strange that thou shouldst live forever? Is it less strange that thou shouldst live at all? This is a miracle; and that no more."

27. Walter Savage Landor: "Belief in the future life is the appetite of reason."

28. John Holmes: "The thought of immortality is as well founded as any other well-authenticated postulate of the human reason."

29. Sir Oliver Lodge: "Smashing the organ is not equivalent to killing the organist, nor is killing the organist equivalent to stopping the music."

30. Jean Paul Sartre: "I do not feel that I am a product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God." (*The Intellectuals Speak Out About God*, ed., Roy Varghese, Gateway Publishers, Chicago, Ill., 1984, p. 128)

31. Aristotle: "Whatsoever that be within us that feels, thinks, desires, and animates, is something celestial and divine, and consequently it is imperishable."

32. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: "My doctrine is that thou mayest desire to live again---that is thy duty---for in any case thou wilt live again."

ADDENDUM A

THE YOUNG PASTOR PREPARING FOR THE FUNERAL

- 1) What is my specific assignment in the memorial service?
- 2) What is the time and place of the service? The interment?
- 3) What is the time and place of the viewing, if any?
- 4) Is the body to be cremated; if so, what is to be done, and when, and where, with the cremains? Are they to be present at the service(s)?
- 5) Are others to participate in the service? Who are they? What, precisely, are they to do, and when? Who is to make contact with them as to their assignment?
- 6) What is the order of the service and who is responsible for designing it?
- 7) Are fraternal organizations, the military, etc., to participate? If so, who is responsible for the overall direction of the service?
- 8) Are there to be other services elsewhere? Where? When? And who announces them?
- 9) Will the body be present for the service? Will the coffin be opened?
- 10) What music, if any, is to be used, and in what order? Who makes contact with the musicians?
- 11) Are pall-bearers to be used? Who are they to be? Who contacts them?
- 12) What special announcements, if any, shall the minister make?
- 13) Are other ministers involved in the services? Who assigns the various ministers their various responsibilities?

ADDENDUM B

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What about the vast variety of funeral customs? There are as many funeral customs as there are communities and churches and funeral directors. The only safe way to prepare for a funeral service in a given situation is to confer with local pastors and funeral directors about local practices. Great care must be taken not to unnecessarily offend people during one of life's most sensitive moments.
2. ***What about funeral services for non-Christians?*** Every minister must follow his own best light as to how he will handle such situations, but if he chooses to conduct such services, he must bear in mind several things: (a) Funerals are for the living, not the dead, (b) The two extremes that must be avoided are to preach the deceased into hell (lest the minister violate good taste, play God, and create immense ill-will), and to preach the deceased into heaven (lest he make a liar out of himself in his pulpit and private ministrations and a farce of the gospel), and (c) In all cases, the good news of the gospel must be carefully and clearly and

compassionately set forth. If the man of God receives freedom from God to deal with the issue of salvation in a frank and straightforward way (as will often be the case), let him do so only under the direct impulsion of God's Holy Spirit, out of a proper motive, in good taste, and with a gentle spirit.

3. ***What about giving an invitation to salvation and Christian discipleship at a funeral service?*** Every time a minister of the gospel speaks publicly, he will naturally, in one way or the other, invite people to Christ. To do otherwise would be unthinkable. The ways in which he does so, however, will be as varied as the situations. Sometimes subtly, sometimes straightforwardly, sometimes openly, sometimes obliquely, but always clearly and compellingly and compassionately, he will invite people to the Saviour as he, to quote John Milton, "asserts eternal providence and vindicates the ways of God to man." They are probably rare, but open invitations have been the instrument of great good at funeral services. I would be glad for him who conducts my home-going service to use the opportunity to invite people to Christ on that occasion, and believe not to do so would be to miss a fruitful opportunity to advance the cause of Christ. What better way to end one's life than that somebody should, upon the occasion of his memorial service, find the Saviour! Remember, however, that I am giving explicit liberty to do so; others may not.

4. ***What if family members request that the minister refrain from "preaching the gospel" at a funeral service?*** That is precisely what happened to me on my very first funeral service! While tenderness and fellow-feeling are always in order, it is not clear what possible place a minister of God has in a situation where he is disallowed to preach God's good news. Again, the experienced minister will find many and various ways in which to speak forth God's truth without being crass or crude. In any case, every man will have to decide for himself how he will handle such situations. The apostolic rule is: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Romans 14:5)

5. ***What about fraternal organizations participating in funeral services?*** It is not unusual for the family of the deceased to request such groups to participate in the memorial service. Each minister will have his own convictions as to precisely how he will deal with such situations, indeed, even whether or not he will participate. Clearly, however, his business is to give a clear-cut witness to the Biblical revelation as to life's most important questions. Such a witness must be done winsomely and with a kindly spirit, but with clarity and vigor and without apology. The minister should, if at all possible, conclude the services in order to have a final and clarifying (!) word as to God's truth. Particularly is that true, as it is at times for all of us, when various cult groups are asked to participate in memorial services.

6. ***What about family members, friends, etc., participating in the memorial service?*** In a word, it is altogether fitting and appropriate to do so if responsible family members wish it to occur. Such participation, if done properly, often adds a note of familial congeniality and camaraderie to the occasion, and thus, helps to assuage the grief. Some churches (I think of the United Methodists) have a tradition of inviting members of the congregation to speak briefly at a certain point in the ceremony; that is often a rich experience.

7. ***What about the location of the funeral service?*** In earlier times, almost all Christian funerals were

conducted at the house of worship. Increasingly, that is not true any longer except in rural areas. All things being equal, it is more appropriate—for all the obvious reasons—that funeral services be held in the church-house, with all its sacred associations of the pilgrimage of faith on the part of the deceased. That fact does not mean that services that are held elsewhere must, in any sense, be secularised.

8. ***What about cremation?*** Burning the body of the deceased is a practice as old as history and has been done by many cultures and peoples. In the Old Testament “burnings” were held for certain kings and were, by definition, cremations. (Some have argued that such burnings were not the norm but, in fact, evidence of disapproval of the life of the subject.) Some religious groups do not cremate, but there seems to be no Biblical prohibitions or proscriptions, either directly or indirectly, against it. Other factors may cause families not to opt for the cremation of the body of a loved one, the most obvious one being the capacity of the living loved ones—particularly the young—to deal with the trauma produced by the act of cremation.

Cremation, obviously, only hastens the process of oxidation, but there is a sense in which it does do violence to the body, a fact which certainly must enter into any consideration of the disposition of the remains of a loved one. The body and the life are not the same, but it is nearly impossible, if not completely so, to think of the life apart from the body. (Parenthetically, the place where the cremation takes place is a “crematorium” and the residue of the cremation is called the “cremains.” They are variously disposed of, at times buried, but sometimes scattered on land or at sea.)

9. ***What about cryogenics?*** Cryogenics offers a relatively new alternative for the disposition of the body of the deceased, that is, freezing it in the hopes that at some future date medical technology may allow for the reversal of death. The process raises huge scientific and moral problems which must be dealt with before cryogenics can be properly addressed as a viable alternative to common funeral practices.

10. ***What about organ donation?*** The transplantation of organs from dying (or dead) to the living offers, in the view of many, opportunities for ministry that, literally, outlasts life. (As I write these lines, a friend who some years had a successful double-lung transplant is awaiting a kidney transplant!) Although no Christian consensus exists on the subject, a growing number of Christians are writing “living wills,” documents that spell out (among other things) the desires of the would-be organ donor. In fact, many hospitals now require that such documents be signed by patients prior to serious surgery regarding “heroic” measures designed to extend life. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been extended through organ donation and, although knotty problems exist (a news article indicates that a man is recovering, at this writing, from the implantation of a baboon liver), such processes will certainly increase in incidence. As in many other matters of this sort (what earlier theologians might have called the “adiaphora,” i.e., the matters of personal choice) the individual conscience, thoroughly informed, must judge. The same general rule applies to questions of genetic engineering, cloning, stem-cell research and use, etc.

11. ***What about funeral services for fetuses?*** It is the common conviction of Christians of every stripe that life begins at conception and, therefore, it is appropriate to conduct memorial services for fetuses, partic-

ularly those of late-term pregnancies, that do not survive. Typically, though not always, such services are conducted at the graveside. The over-riding concern that should guide such practices is the emotional and spiritual welfare of the family. The memorial service serves as a powerful witness to the significance of every life, however short-lived.

12. *What about funerals for suicides?* Despite common opinion, the Bible does not teach that suicides may not enter into heaven, and therefore, upon such an assumption, funerals must not be held for suicides. To be sure, the Bible mandates against murder and, clearly, suicide is murder and constitutes, thus, a grave sin (leaving aside all questions as to the mental state of the suicide). Since, however, those Christians who have committed sins and died before a final repentance continue to belong to the family of God, so must the Christian suicide. Counselors of every sort know that all humans have breaking points and it is wise to withhold judgment about the mental state of the suicide until we know all things

As to “euthanasia” or “mercy-killing,” it is finding support from a wide range of counselors and doctors and even ministers. It promises to be a subject of intense debate for years to come because of “life-sustaining” medical support systems which will, predictably, lengthen life and produce a plethora of problems for those very advanced in age or other end-of-life conditions. Some governments have already legalized euthanasia, and, from various indications in recent years, more are ending their lives that way than are being reported. As many as fifteen or twenty percent of such cases, it is claimed by some, are “assisted” in death without the consent of the patient.

The Bible does not give a clear and explicit prohibition against suicide as such, except the general proscription against murder. The cases of Ahithophel, Zimri, Samson, Saul and Abimelech, along with Romans 14:7-9, I Corinthians 6:19, and Ephesians 5:29, and especially Philippians 1:21-26 are of interest in the matter. (For a very informative and extended discussion of suicide, see the article “suicide” in Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.)

That brings up “pulling the plug” situations which every pastor of experience has had happen. Families, in the throes of grief because of the approaching death of a loved one will, typically, turn to their minister for counsel as to when to remove all life support systems. Beyond the legal questions---with which medical attendants are very familiar---the decision lies, clearly, with the family members. A minister may give counsel, but he must not take such a momentous decision out of their hands. The essential rules of counsel would be, aside from the legal questions, (a) What, if anything, does the Bible say about the specific situation?, (b) What do the medical community representatives say?, (c) What would the patient himself likely want?, (d) What would I do if were my loved one?, (e) What is the merciful thing to do?, etc. None of that will, in most situations, answer all questions, but sufficient light may be shed leading to an informed decision. Death is a matter no one wants to talk about but no one can escape talking about. Something has to be said, after all. Jesus’ rule is paramount: “All things that ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.”

ADDENDUM C

“WHAT SHALL I SAY?”

Do not say:

1. “You are strong enough to handle this.”
2. “God must love you in a special way to have trusted you with this.”
3. “Just turn it all over to God.”
4. “This is the will of God.”
5. “This had to happen to somebody, and God must have known that you could handle it.”
6. “I know just how you feel.” (I actually heard a woman say to her friend who had just lost her husband, “I know how you feel; my dog died last year.”)
7. “God needs her to do something for Him in heaven.”
8. “You shouldn’t be so sad.”
9. “You’ll get over this.”
10. “Everybody has to die sometime.”
11. “You can’t cry because you have to be strong for others.”
12. “People are watching to see how you will handle this.”
13. “We must not question the will of God.”
14. “God will give you another child.”
15. “This has happened to a lot of people.”
16. “Actually, you’re very lucky; think of what might have happened.”
17. “If you think you’ve had it bad, consider what happened to me!”

All such responses, in one way or the other, trivialize the experience, disallow the sufferer a natural expression of grief, and / or place the blame for the event on the shoulders of the sufferers.

Immediately upon the death of a loved one, perhaps the most meaningful thing one friend can say to another goes something like this: “I don’t understand, but I love you; you matter to me. I’ll be here.”

“Dr. L. P. Jacks maintains that ‘two lines of Wordsworth---But she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!’ are a more adequate expression of human grief than all the funeral sermons ever preached.” (*Heralds of God*, James Stewart, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1949, p. 150; the lines are from *Lucy*, written in 1799.)

Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, puts her finger on the pulse of the sufferer with these insightful lines:

Don’t talk to me yet;
the wound is fresh,

the nauseous pain
I can't forget
fades into numbness
like a wave,
then comes again.

Your tears I understand,
But grief is deaf;
It cannot hear the words
you gently planned
and tried to say.
But.....pray.

(*Wounded Heroes*, Elizabeth Skoglund, Baker Book House,
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992, p. 200)

The pastor in a formal funeral setting can say more, and should, but his essential personal message should be the that of love / care / availability. The passage of time, as the living work through the various stages of response to death, affords opportunities for fuller ministrations which will naturally present themselves. A personal note following the funeral by several weeks, or during the following Easter season, would serve as an excellent means of affirmation. *A cardinal rule: we must not allow the one who has suffered such a loss to slip out of our consciousness and care.*

I have mentioned the various stages of response to death. Bereavement takes people through several, well-defined, emotional locations. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book, *On Death and Dying* labels some of the most common ones: (1) Denial-"This is simply not happening to me; it's a dream and one day I'll wake up," (2) Rage / anger-"How could this happen to me; why me; I don't deserve this....," (3) Bargaining-"If I could have this person back, I'd...," (4) Depression-"I simply am incapable of handling this; life has lost it's meaning and I can't go on," and (5) Acceptance-"It's terrible, but somehow, I've got to get on with life in a positive way." (See *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, N.Y., 1969)

Many churches are now sponsoring grief-recovery groups which have often proven to be immensely helpful in death settings. A warning, however: it is not wise to push people into such settings too soon; a certain measure of equilibrium, not to say healing, must be achieved in order for such settings to be most effective.

ADDENDUM D THE LIVING WILL

The Living Will is simply a document that reads, commonly, as follows, and should---upon acceptance---be signed and notarized. Others, at the least significant family members, the pastor, and one's own personal physician, should have copies. It, obviously, does not deal with any theological / ethical issues such settings engender.

To my family, my physician, my lawyer, my clergyman,

To any medical facility in whose care I happen to be,

To any individual who may become responsible for my health, welfare, or affairs:

Death is as much a reality as birth, growth, maturity and old age---it is the one certainty of life. If the time comes when I can no longer take part in decisions for my own future, let this statement stand as an expression of my wishes while I am still of sound mind.

If the situation should arise in which there is no reasonable expectation of my recovery from physical or mental disability, I request that I be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial means or "heroic" measures. I do not fear death itself as much as the indignities of deterioration, dependence and hopeless pain. I therefore ask that medication be mercifully administered to me to alleviate suffering even though this may hasten the moment of death.

This request is made after careful consideration. I hope you who care for me will feel morally bound to follow its mandate. I recognize that this appears to place a heavy responsibility upon you, but it is with the intention of relieving you of such responsibility and of placing it upon myself in accordance with my strong convictions that this statement is made.

ADDENDUM E

JOSEPHINE MARGARET SCHULER ANDERSON

January 20, 1899-October 26, 2000

Like a pale candle against a frosted pane
She sits, purged of passion's tinctures;
Bone china in winter's ember light,
Awaiting "The Great Experiment" with serene eyes.

No lines of worry crease her face;
None of life's fevers redden her brow;
Her arms pull at none of life's oars;
Woolened feet of ninety-eight years are still now.

Freed of the weight of earth's belongings,
She is a plutocrat of the soul;
Wiser than Midas, she always knew
No man is by possessions made whole.

Some day they will tell me she's gone,
And no one will register surprise;
Nor would I, could I, prevent her journey,
But when she goes, she'll leave a lonely place
 against my skies.

I wrote these lines after visiting my Mother one autumn evening in 1997, when she was ninety-eight years of age. When I entered her room, I found her mesmerized by the view from her huge southern window overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the living embodiment of serenity. She had not heard me enter the room, and so I stood quietly and took in the memorable scene for a while before disturbing her reverie. She often called death "The Great Experiment," and--though she enjoyed life immensely and found it fascinating--said she was ready to experience its next phase. Apparently (she never had a birth certificate) she was born on January 20th, 1899, in Frankfort, Kentucky and was baptised into the Catholic Church on the following February 11. After her death, in closing out all of her affairs, I was not surprised to find that her entire belongings came to a value of less than fifty dollars, possessing not one belonging of any value, as the world counts value. Even her pictures were gone, she having lost her eyesight about fifteen years earlier. I always thought of her as being immensely wealthy, but it was all on the inside.