



IS THERE REALLY LIFE AFTER DEATH?

EASTER SUNDAY

by

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“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

—Revelation 1:18

“It was,” said Papini, “one of those serene dawnings that reminds one of sleeping innocence; the hour when the pure and limpid atmosphere seems still to vibrate with the recent passage of a flight of angels. . . .” It was the dawning of the most magnificent, the most marvelous, and the most monumental day in all of history. It was the day of Resurrection—a resurrection of that One who had sundered the centuries apart and split time forevermore, and now had come to break the bands of death and set the prisoners free. Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

He is the greatest Person who ever lived, for many reasons. One of them is that He solved the greatest problem we have or ever will have, and that is the problem of death. Many people don’t think about that as being the most pressing and most important problem. Nevertheless, it is. We spend, in this country alone, hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars on death—at least in an effort to hold it at bay, to stay that hollow-eyed lank-jawed skull with the beckoning bony finger—to keep it away, at least for a time.

For instance, such things as doctors, nurses, hospitals, surgeries, pharmacists, pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies, as well as the police, the firemen, the air force, the marines, the

navy, the army, the United Nations—or for that matter, most everything we do is simply an attempt to postpone death. How many of you would go to work if you would never die? A great many would not, I am sure.

THE KING OF TERRORS

Death! The king of terrors it has rightly been called. The Bible says that Satan has kept the world in bondage throughout our whole lives because of the fear of death. It is the last enemy to be overcome, we are told.

- Francis Bacon, a great scientist, said that as children fear the dark, so men fear death.
- Carlyle said, “Frightful to all men is Death; from of old named King of Terrors.”
- Samuel Johnson (the man who gave us the first English dictionary), said that most people spend all of their lives going from one vocation to another, trying to distract themselves from thinking about their own mortality.
- Sir Walter Raleigh, who wrote a great history of the world, never finished it, because he had a prior appointment.

How many tombstones would rightly bear the words: “Unfinished. Prior Appointment.” But in the part of that history that was finished, Raleigh apostrophized death with these telling words:

O eloquent, just and mighty Death!
Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded;
What none hath dared, thou hast done;
And whom all the world flattered
Thou only cast out of the world and despised.
Thou hast drawne together
All the far stretched greatness,
All the pride, crueltie, and ambition of man,
And covered it all over with these two narrow. Words: *Hic jacet* [here lies].

DOSTOEVSKI

Yes, death is the king of terrors. Dostoevsky was, without doubt, the greatest of all of the Russian writers. As a young man he was a radical and fouled the censorship laws of the Czars. Having committed this breach, he and many other such writers were arrested. He was brought to trial, and expected no more than a reprimand, a slap on the wrist, possibly a couple of days in jail. But then, standing, he heard the sentence read: “You are sentenced to be shot.”

He stumbled backward at the word. He could not believe it. This could not be happening. Yet the day came shortly thereafter when he was clothed in a long white shirt in which his body was to be tossed into an open dirt grave. He was marched out onto a great parade ground. In the center, three stakes had been prepared. The hands of the first three men were tied to the poles behind them. He observed that he was eighth in line.

He figured he now had probably five minutes of life left. He thought that in the first two minutes he would remember all of his loved ones, and so he began to think about those that he was going to be leaving. Then, in the next two minutes, he thought about all the things in this world that he had enjoyed. He thought (as now his hands were tied behind him to the pole), that he would give his last minute to looking around and thinking about this world. As he was doing this, there suddenly dawned upon him the thought: There are hundreds of millions of people in this world who are *not* going to be shot this morning . . .

Then he heard the command: “Ready!” The rifles came up and aimed at him, and he froze in terror. He was looking into those hollow eyes of death. His body became rigid. “Aim!” He now knew that should they cut his hands loose, and should the soldiers drop their guns and he were told to leave that he could neither run nor walk, nor could he even move his hands or his fingers. He was frozen absolutely solid in terror. He was looking into the eyes of death, and it was a terror unlike anything he had ever known or even could have imagined.

Suddenly there was a shout, and a man on horseback came riding across the parade ground waving a piece of paper. It was for him a pardon from the Czar. Well, not exactly a pardon, but a commutation of his sentence to some years in Siberia. He was never more grateful for anything in his life.

When he arrived in Siberia, an elderly woman (another prisoner there) slipped to him a New Testament worn with age and use. He devoured it. He studied it, and he believed it. Jesus Christ came into his life and delivered him from that fear of death and gave him the assurance of life eternal. That experience was so traumatic in his life that it has been said that all of his writings are simply an effort to explain to the world what death really is to an unbeliever. Yes, my friends, it is a terrible thing for those that don’t know Christ.

VOLTAIRE

Dostoevsky was but an author. What about a “real” scholar who has examined the matter and knows that there is no God to fear, no future life to be worried about—a person who has really looked into the matter. Consider that person who might well be called the greatest skeptic, the most voluble, witty, erudite, brilliant scholar and skeptic perhaps who has ever attacked the Church. His name was Voltaire. He wrote an entire encyclopedia against the Bible and against Christ.

However, alas for him, as for all of us, the time finally came when the sand in the hourglass of his life was running out. He was now on his deathbed. This man, who in the halcyon days of youth was robust and healthy, had said of Jesus Christ, “Curse the wretch.” Now, he would bring together all of the great philosophies he had written, all of the skepticism and supposed evidence against the Bible, and he would demolish the whole thought from his mind. Or would he?

Rather, he called for a clergyman. He had decided the time had come to “be reconciled” with the Church. So, the clergyman came. His infidel flatterers had heard about this call for a clergyman, and they were terrified. They were aghast at his supposed recantation of his unbelief. They rushed to his bedside to prevent it, but, alas, it was to no avail, for they were only to witness his ignominy and their own, because he cursed them to their face, saying, “Begone! Get away from me. It is because of you that I am brought to my present condition. Leave me, I say.

Begone! What a wretched glory this is that you have produced for me.” (As always, we try to blame others for our own sins.)

But still not relieved of his anguish by confession to the clergyman, he called for a letter of recantation. He had several people witness it. When it was prepared, he signed it, declaring that he disavowed all of his unbelief and accepted Christ. However, there was one thing he didn't know. The Scriptures make it plain: **“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found” (Isaiah 55:6). “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3).** Unless the Spirit of God draws us, we will never come. Now Voltaire found out that his heart was so encrusted that he could not repent, he could not believe, and he was thrown into paroxysms of anguish and torment.

He suffered for two more long, interminable months. He could not repent, he could not believe, and yet he vacillated back and forth from one to the other. One moment he would say, “Lord Jesus, God, have mercy upon me,” and then he would curse both God and man. He would say, “O Christ, O Christ, Jesus, help me,” and then, “O, Lord Jesus, I must die—abandoned by God and men.” Even his infidel associates were afraid to approach his bed. They guarded the door, however, from outside, lest anyone would come and see this apostasy of an unbeliever.

Still things grew worse for Voltaire. Come with me on tiptoes into that bedroom and watch the final moments. Voltaire's nurse and physician were the only ones in the room to see the final hours. His physician, Trochim, said, “The death of this infidel was a scene of horror that lay beyond the power of all exaggeration.” You could not describe it worse than it actually was.

PAINE

Or consider one right in our own country: Thomas Paine. At the beginning of the American Revolution, he was a celebrity. He had written an outstanding book, but he was also an unbeliever, and that unbelief finally outed. He wrote about his disbelief in Christ and the Scriptures and attacked them all in a book entitled *The Age of Reason*. He sent the manuscript to Benjamin Franklin, who read it and expostulated with Paine, saying, “By no means publish this book. It will bring upon you disaster and calamity.”

Despite this, in 1793 he had the book published. He, too, came to the place where the sands were running out. At that time Paine said, “I would give worlds if I had them if the *Age of Reason* had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone.” In that he was prescient, for hell is no big party. It is to be alone in outer darkness forever and ever.

His life dragged on, also, for a number of months, and things worsened for him. Finally he was left simply to the mercy and care of gracious followers of the Galilean, who were the only ones who would take care of him in his extremity. Paine lived a desolate and a vile life. He physically abused his first wife so badly that she left him. His second wife left him as well. His third “wife” wasn't his wife. She was the wife of his benefactor, who had invited him into his home to take care of him, and while there, he seduced her.

Paine had been hired several times by the American government and fired as well for fraud and dishonesty, for drunkenness and a dissolute life. This profane godless man now is come to the end.

Paine also called for a clergyman: Bishop Fenwick, who brought with him F. Coleman, an intimate friend of his [Paine's]. When they entered his Greenwich, New York, home, the physician said, "A more wretched being in appearance I never beheld." Bishop Fenwick began to speak to him in kindly tones about his soul. But after just a few minutes, Paine changed his mind again, after having invited the bishop to do this, and said,

That's enough, sir, that's enough. I see what you would be about. I wish to hear no more from you, sir; my mind is made up on that subject. I look upon the whole of the Christian scheme to be a tissue of lies, and Jesus Christ to be nothing more than a cunning knave and impostor. Away with you, and your God, too! Leave the room instantly! All that you have uttered are lies, filthy lies, and if I had a little more time I would prove it, as I did about your impostor, Jesus Christ.

They left the room, and as they closed the door behind them, they heard the last words of Tom Paine, indicative of the utter confusion of this vile man. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And he died. Dear friends, I would be willing to wager, if I were a wagering man, that those words about Voltaire or Paine are virtually never heard or taught in *any* of the philosophy or history classes in any of our colleges today.

CONTRAST WITH BELIEVERS

Behold how the believer faces death—the king of terrors. What a contrast, because Christ not only has conquered death, He brought life and immortality to light, and those who trust in Him can have the blessed assurance that they will be with Him forever.

TOPLADY

Augustus M. Toplady, the great Christian minister and hymn writer, wrote the famous hymn, "Rock of Ages." "Rock of Ages [Jesus Christ], cleft for me. Let me hide myself in Thee." He, too, came to the end of his days, and he said, "Oh, what delights. Who can fathom the joy of the Third Heaven." He said, "No mortal man can live after the glories which God has manifested to my soul this day." Then he died. His final word was, "All is light." What a difference that is.

GORDON

A. J. Gordon, a great Christian minister who blessed the world with many of his books, when on his deathbed, was asked to say a few words. He had no strength left, but he gathered up all of his energy—and what did he say? Did he say, as Tallyrand, the skeptic said, "I am suffering the pangs of the damned"? Did he say, "It is too late now, too late"? Did he say, "Everything is dark, dark, dark"? No. What he said was, "Victory!" And he died.

What a difference between the death of the skeptic, the unbeliever, and the death of a Christian. Wonderful to tell, this is not some figment of someone's imagination. It is fact. It is an historical fact. Christ has overcome death and the tomb and brought life and immortality to light in such a way that it is incontrovertible. Please note this: The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best proved fact of history!

ARNOLD

Consider the words of Professor Thomas Arnold, professor of history at Oxford University, the author of the three-volume *History of Rome*. This man, among other things, said this:

I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.

This statement by Thomas Arnold, a great historian, professor of history at Oxford University. “No one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence . . .” Yet I had a nineteen or twenty-year-old boy say to me one time, “Well, after all, preacher, there is no evidence is there?” What a display of absolute ignorance.

LYNDHURST

Or consider Lord Lyndhurst, recognized as one of the greatest legal minds in British history. He had conferred upon him the highest honors any judge or jurist could ever have. He was elected as Solicitor-General of the British government in 1819, then the attorney general of Great Britain, and finally, he was the High Chancellor of England. He was elected as the High Steward of the University of Cambridge, thus holding in one lifetime the highest offices that any judge in Great Britain could ever have conferred upon him (and which no other person ever received).

What did he say? If this isn't a statement of incredible humility, I have never heard one. This man, with all those titles, said: “I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection [of Christ] has never broken down yet.”

GREENLEAF

Or, cross the Pond and come to America and go to Harvard. If you were to meet the greatest scholar in the history of the law school of Harvard University, it would be Simon Greenleaf, who made that school what it was. He was the greatest authority on legal evidences in the history of mankind. He one time was challenged to examine the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. He had written great tomes on the laws of evidence. Many of the laws of evidence used in our courtrooms today were written by Simon Greenleaf.

After having examined every thread of evidence for the Resurrection, this man, who started as a disbeliever, concluded that if the evidence for the resurrection of Christ were presented before any unbiased courtroom in the world, they would have to conclude that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead. So said Professor Dr. Simon Greenleaf, Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University.

THE DEBATE

Forty years ago, this month, there was a large “Twist” platform here on the beach. You remember the Twist, don't you? Some of you may still be going to chiropractors because of the Twist. It was big back then, but on this particular Holy Week, there was a new twist to the Twist platform—they were going to have a debate between a Christian and an atheist, and the subject was the Resurrection: Is Jesus Christ Risen From the Dead?

The Christian was a minister who had a radio broadcast up north, and the atheist was the president of the Florida Chapter of the American Humanist Society. The minister was asked to

go first, and for a number of minutes he set forth one cogent argument after another concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When he finally was finished, the atheist was invited to rebut what he had said. I was there, as were about 500 college students. Here was an opportunity for him to disprove the Resurrection, which he would say, of course, is certainly fictitious and never happened.

He got up and told about the Florida Chapter of the American Humanist Society—when they had their meetings, and where, what their agenda was, and what they were trying to do. He went on and on for about five minutes. Then he sat down—to the utter astonishment of everyone, because he made no effort to rebut any argument. In fact, he never even mentioned the Resurrection. In the question and answer period that followed, one student raised his hand and said, “Well, sir, do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the tomb?”

He said, “No. I don’t believe it”—as if his opinion was worth more than all the evidence in the world.

I couldn’t let him get off quite that easy, so I said, “Well, sir, since it is acknowledged worldwide that the tomb was empty, if Jesus Christ didn’t rise from the dead, what happened to the body?”

He responded with articulateness that I have seldom seen, and marshaled such cogent arguments as you may never have heard in your life. I was truly astonished. He shrugged his shoulders, as in “I don’t know.” That was it! I was utterly amazed. I asked the man from the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship who arranged these debates all over the country for a good many years, “How do they usually come out?”

He said that in every single one of them, the person defending the Resurrection wins hands down. They have tried to get the best-qualified atheists, skeptics, college professors, scientists, whoever, to debate it, and always the Resurrection wins, because it is the best-proved fact of history.

He mentioned Dr. John Gerstner, Sr., and said that Gerstner chewed up his opponent until he was just little pieces. There was nothing left, hardly, to pick up. Another time, he said, the person defending the Resurrection set forth so much evidence that when the atheist’s turn came to rebut it, he refused to stand up and speak—and the debate was over.

NO DEATH

My friends, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is demonstrated and proved by more evidence of every sort than any other event in the history of the world. Christ rose from the dead. But, my friends, what that proves is that we, too, will rise—all of us, everyone. Not only that, I can say this: I am not concerned about being put into a casket and lowered into a grave. No one will ever shovel dirt on my face. I am not going to be in a grave.

You say, “Ah, is he going to be buried at sea?” No. I am not going to be in the grave. Oh, my body will be there, but when people are, perhaps, gathered around the open hole in the

ground, and a few tears are shed, I will be looking down from Paradise. I will be more alive than I have ever been in my life. Not only am I never going to go into a grave or a casket (this may startle some of you), but I am never going to die, and if you are planning to die, I really feel sorry for you.

How can I say that? Jesus Christ said it: **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26)**. I live. I believe in Him. I will never die. Sorry about you!

As you have read the accounts of hundreds and hundreds of people who have had near-death or after-death experiences, one thing is sure: Many of them never even knew they died. I think of a man who was in a military hospital here in America. He decided he needed to get up for some reason. He got out of his bed, and walked out of the room and down the hall. An orderly came around the corner with a tray, carrying something, and the man said, “Look out!” but the orderly didn’t seem to hear him. He ran right into him and right *through* him.

He then realized that something was amiss. He returned to his room and found that the sheet had been pulled up over his face, or at least not his face, because there he was looking at it—the face of someone who was now in his bed. He went around on the other side of the bed, where a hand was hanging down (his left hand) and whoever this man was, he had on his watch and his ring. Only then did he realize that he had died, as the world calls it, but somehow he was revived and lived to tell the tale.

When that day comes for me and when the last grains of sand run out of the hourglass of my life, I will simply step out of this body into Paradise. That is the promise of Jesus Christ. We need not fear the grave. If you are a believer in Christ, you will never be in a grave

PRAYER: Father, we know that there are two stops on the trolley car of life: one in Paradise, and the other into hell . We know that Jesus said that He is alive forevermore and has the keys of hell and of death. We know, God, that your word says, **“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14)**.

Lord, I fear that there are some here who have never personally encountered Jesus Christ, who have not personally experienced His transforming love, the change in life that only He can make, the assurance of salvation that only He can give. I would ask right now, O God, that you would cause them to repent of their sins, while still they are able, lest they come to look square in the face of death itself and find themselves unable to repent, unable to believe and facing the horrors, the terrors, of death and hell .

May they say right now, while the day of grace is still above us: “Lord Jesus Christ, I am a sinner, deserving of your wrath, but I believe that you came and took it for me on the Cross and paid for it all. Right now, I ask you to come into my heart, cleanse me, wash me, renew me, fill me with your Spirit, and grant me eternal life. I repent of my sins. I place my faith and trust in Thee alone.” In Thy name. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on April 20, 2003, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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