

Scriptural Truths

E-Mail Meditations

The Lord May Come . . . Perhaps Today . . . Behold, I Come Quickly . . . Rev. 22:7

No. 18

August 2013

Three Deaths in One Day

Readings

- a) "When He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost" (Matt. 27:50)
- b) "Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost" (Mk. 15:37)
- c) "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost" (Lk. 23:46)
- d) "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost" (Jn. 19:30)

Introduction

On Monday April 8th 2013 the world heard the words "died today" three times over.

- a) Margaret Thatcher, the "iron lady" died
- b) Raven, the world renowned hypnotist died
- c) Annette Funicello, one of Walt Disney's Mouseketeers died

Margaret Thatcher made people think. They loved or hated her for her policies. Raven made people laugh as he hypnotized others. Annette Funicello gave people a somewhat innocent joy. As I thought of this triple happening I was caused to think of another day when three people died. One was a King and the other two were malefactors. One had the superscription written over His head: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37). One of those malefactors was the only one who believed Christ would rise from the dead, and in his last hours on earth was brought into fellowship with God. The other died in his sins.

The death of any individual is a solemn experience but how much more sacred and solemn it is when we are musing on the death of the Lord, and two men entering eternity. God is the God of infinite love, and plainly says, He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Concerning the death of a saint the lord says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psa. 116:15). How much more precious must the death of the Lord been to God?

If the Lord does not come, it is the moment we all will face. Some will be aware of its approaching, for others it will be unexpected, some the result of a long slow illness, and others by the slow deterioration of the body. Regardless the circumstance, there will come a moment when each will breathe their last breath.

Dissect the moment of the death of the Lord. In the Old Testament they dissected the animal, a very solemn and sacred time. How much more holy is the ground we tread on in this meditation?

The Physical Death of The Lord

1) That which did not cause the death of the Lord:

- a) There have been many suggestions as to what caused the death of the Lord. I am going to list nine of them.
 - i) The weakening of the body through suffering and the crucifixion, a broken heart, a blood clot, suffocation, shock, loss of blood, dehydration, suicide, foolish bravado, an accident waiting to happen, all of which are as foolish and erroneous as the shroud of Turin. Great and intelligent as men may be, when they say or write the following:
 1. Dr. Frederick Zugibe: "Christ died from shock due to loss of blood and fluid, plus traumatic shock from his injuries, plus cardiogenic shock causing Christ's heart to fail."
 2. James Thompson: "Jesus died from agony of mind producing rupture of the heart."
 3. Dr. Mark Eastman: "The primary cause of death by crucifixion is asphyxiation. That is, the victim slowly suffocates until dead, and there are other contributing factors, hypovolemic shock, exhaustion, dehydration, stress induced arrhythmias, congestive heart failure, pericardial and pleural effusions, and cardiac rupture."
 4. Another says: "The shallowness of breathing causes small areas of the lung to collapse. This results in decreased oxygen and increased carbon dioxide, causes acidic conditions in the tissues. This results in fluid, which building up in the lungs ultimately causes heart stress and then failure."

Make no mistake:

**There is no medical, physiological, or physical cause of the death of Christ.
Christ was never a dying man.**

- b) Our Lord said: "I lay down my life . . . no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (Jn. 10:17-18). He "offered Himself" (Heb. 9:14). Other scriptures endorsing the same truth are Psa. 40:6-8; Jn. 10:15; Eph. 5:2, 25; Heb. 7:27). His death was spoken of as an "accomplishment" (Lk. 9:31), and where there is added to this the scriptures at the beginning of the paper which repeatedly record: "He gave up the ghost".
 - c) The scriptures are very emphatic on the fact that the death of the Lord had a spiritual intervention:
 - i) He committed His spirit to God (Matt. 27:50; Jn. 19:30)
 - ii) He gave up the ghost (Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46)
 - iii) In contrast to the animal sacrifices which were mercifully killed then put on the altar, the Lord was alive when placed on the altar, and knew the fierceness of the judgment of God.
- 2) The animal sacrifice was dead, had no emotional or spiritual consciousness of that which it was enduring or for what purpose, Christ did.
 - 3) The distinguishing between the physical death and that which was the forsaking of Christ by God, reverently we may call it a spiritual death, although the term is not altogether accurate.
 - 4) The pictures of the physical death of Christ.
 - 5) The glorification of Christ from His physical death.
 - 6) The accomplishments of Christ by His physical death.

The Repentant Thief

While there are many remarkable testimonies in the scriptures, the conversion of those at the cross are among the most amazing.

Interestingly, it is not the Lord who begins the conversation with this man, it is a work of God, and it was "time for the Lord to be silent". It is a lesson many need to learn. When God is working there is a time to be silent until the sinner speaks. At times, in our desire to see someone saved, we try to do the work of the Holy Spirit by speaking and talking, and talking and speaking.

This thief is a wonderful example of salvation without works! This man had nothing in his past to offer for God's acceptability, and he had certainly nothing in the future. His past was a dark sordid life of crime, and life was fast ebbing away. He could never get baptized, nor if necessary be circumcised, or keep the Passover. He was totally bereft of

anything to offer whereby to plead grace. Gloriously it is the Lord who does all the giving and assurance. Yet this man had several major truths going for him:

- a) He knew the gracious character of the man on the middle cross
- b) He believed that despite how things looked, this man would rise again
- c) He knew there was a life after death
- d) He knew his own sinfulness

In the awareness of these facts he spoke to the Lord, and in doing so, indicated that he knew some of the history of God's compassion to those in the Old Testament. He said: "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). Where did he learn the expression: "Remember me"? He possibly knew Joseph had said it for the words "think on me" (Gen. 40:14); or "remember me" by Samson (Jud. 16:28), or Hannah (1 Sam. 1:11). However, I am inclined to sway toward his possible thinking of Nehemiah when he said: "Remember me, O my God . . . and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy" (Neh. 13:22). Yet, he could not place himself among any of these for Joseph was being punished despite being innocent, the thief was guilty of numerous crimes. Samson was a man raised by God to be a judge among the people of God and had a very checkered past. This thief was one who was judged by the people of God and condemned by God's law. Hannah was a virtuous woman who wept before God. This was possibly the first time the thief ever said a prayer, and herein we see his confidence in the Lord, and His deity, for how else would He have called Christ "Lord"? He pleads on the grounds of divine mercy, just as Nehemiah did.

This conversion teaches several lessons:

- a) There can be death bed conversions, but there is a distinct difference between this man and many a death bed conversion. This man lived long enough to declare to all the Lordship of Christ, His resurrection, His coming Kingdom, the after life, and declared it to all who could hear! Personally, I am always cautious of deathbed conversions when the individual dies within hours. We cannot know what happens between an individual and God for like Paul, we must say: "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). Having said that, it is very foolish to live life knowing the gospel and its ultimatums, to continue in rejection of Christ and expect God to just be there at our beck and call. We must face the reality that for many who have death bed conversions, it is because they suddenly are aware of hell and emotionally lay hold of Christ as a fire escape, or a "just-in-case" my works are not sufficient, and then one adds Christ to the mixture. The next paragraph will balance this off.
- b) We never know when or where the last call of the Spirit implores, therefore, while the individual is alive, be ready for the unexpected. The Lord is still longing for all to come to repentance. If the Holy Spirit convicts an unsaved individual of their sins, and despite having only a few hours to live, if they repent and in sincerity accept the Lord as Savior, He is willing and ready to forgive.
- c) His conversion to God was so unexpected. Had we been there and told that at least two people among this crowd are going to be saved today, who do you think it will be"? I expect some would have said: "perhaps some of the common people", or "perhaps one of the Jewish leaders", but I do not think any of us would have thought of the thief and the Centurion. One a cold callous soldier hardened to the sight of suffering and death, the other a self seeking terrorist. Thank God His ways are not ours.
- d) His conversion to God was so sudden. If we time the duration of the actual conversation it is only a matter of approximately fifteen seconds! How long the Spirit of God had been working with the man before he spoke we do not know. It may have been numerous times throughout the years, but the actual acceptance of salvation was done within seconds. Thank God there does not have to be a repentance, then a believing, then an acceptance, and then a laying on of hands, with an undetermined duration between each activity. Salvation is instantaneous.
- e) There is no mention of this man's age. What a blessing. He may have been in his 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's, or 60's. The fact is clear, his age was irrelevant to the pledge of the Lord. Thank God for those who are saved early in life and thank God for those in later years that get saved. It is nothing other than the mercy of God.

"Today", the assurance of being with the Lord. What a promise the Lord gave to the thief. See the marvel of it in its parts. (Lk. 23:43)

- a) "Today". Not tomorrow, not next year, but in eternity today. What a prospect. This would drive away the darkness of death: "Absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:8).
- b) "Shalt thou". This was the Lord's personal pledge to him as an individual. It was not a general statement applicable to both thieves, but only to the repentant sinner. There is no such a thing as universal salvation.

- c) “Be with me”. Well did the hymn-writer pen the words: “Forever with the Lord”. The Lord said: “Where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:3). We will be with Him and He with us (1 Thess. 3:13).
- d) “In Paradise”. Who can tell what it meant to that man. Here a wasted body, a weakening frame, no hope for earthly gain, and in a few hours the pain would be over, the broken legs would be a thing of the past, sorrow and tears forever gone. He would be in Paradise with the Lord for all eternity. What a way to die!

The Unrepentant Thief

Of the many happenings at the time of the Lord’s death, except for the case of Judas, there is perhaps none to equal it except the unrepentant thief. Like Herod, this man had heard the voice of witness: “We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss” (Lk. 23:41), but there was no repentance in him. He was in the last breathings of life, there was no possibility of escape, the clammy coldness of death was moment by moment creeping over his body, and still he stubbornly refused to acknowledge his sins. The Lord knew the line had been crossed, the man would never be saved, and in his last conscious moments there is not a word from the one who could have been his Savior. On the banks of the Niagara River there is a notice: “Past redemption point”. This man had passed that point and there was nothing left but the blackness of darkness and eternal judgment of God.

Some time ago there were two lads in Scotland who were the best of pals. One day when swimming one got into trouble and his friend pulled him to safety. In time one went into law and the other became a criminal and a murderer. As it so happened, the judge was the one who had been his friend and saved him from the churning waters years before. Being found guilty the judge said: “There was a day I was your Savior, today I am your judge” and the man was sentenced to death. There is coming a day when this thief will hear the voice of the Lord, not pleading in tender tones, but hearing the darkest words ever to fall on mortal ears: “Depart from me, I never knew you” (Matt. 25:41), and be banished into the Lake of fire forever.

Forever lost

You once were there to be my Friend
 To have my sins forgiven,
 I spurned, I mocked, I nervous laughed
 For pleasure I was driven.

When suddenly that clammy draft
 Across my form then swept,
 No cries for pity from me rose
 No mercy, though I wept.

Condemned, unsheltered by the blood
 My wickedness exposed,
 I thought there’d come another day
 Ah then, I then supposed.

No earthly joy or pleasure came
 To ease that dreadful flight,
 I stood there quivering on the edge
 Of hell’s eternal night.

God spoke no word, now silently
 The books revealed no hope!
 I saw the fiercely burning Hell
 And then the silence broke.

“Depart from me”, in darkness bound
 A soul forever lost,
 How stubborn blatant blind was I
 When Jesus paid the cost.

And now, no hope, O dreadful thought
In Hell's eternal night,
Forever banished from the God
Whose mercy I did slight.

While others sing His endless praise
With grief I'm sorrow tossed,
Unspeakable this state of mine
Forever damned - "I'M LOST"

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