

“THE BLESSED DEAD”

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"And 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." Rev. 14 : 13.

To understand this text, it is necessary to recognize the different senses in which the words die and dead are used in the Bible. 1. Literal death, cessation of being, the opposite of life -- "The dead know not anything." -- (Ecc. 9:5) 2. The condition of the world of mankind since Adam's disobedience, as indicated in Rom. 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered in-to the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Then in Eph. 2:1 the apostle refers to those who were "dead in trespasses and sins." This is a figurative use of the word "dead". This is further shown by our Lord in Matt. 8:22, "Follow me: and let the dead bury their dead." -- These were physically alive, but were out of harmony with God, the source of life, and were on the Broad Road to destruction; they were on their way to literal death. 3. The condition of the true followers of Jesus -- "Ye are dead" the Apostle says in Col. 3:3. Vs. 1 to 3 read, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Those in Christ have voluntarily renounced all human hopes according to 2 Cor. 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Instead of living to get what human enjoyment we can, we use up in God's service what life is left. The true Christian is on the road to actual death as a human being -- he is counted alive, as a new creature in Christ. We do give up the only tangible things we now possess, and that is our life as human beings, with its privileges and enjoyments. Only those who have faith and who believe God's promises, are willing to do this.

God created humanity with desires, with cravings for the good things of this earth. Living in the full sense, consists in satisfying these desires. One normal human desire is for physical food -- a part of living is to have this desire satisfied. There are of course many other cravings -- companionship, the study of nature, planning things, making things -- we could go on and on. Those who can satisfy these desires, say, "This is living." Anyone who cannot enjoy the good things the Creator has provided for them, might as well be dead -- it is sometimes said of a person in this condition, "He is merely existing."

As the Lord's people we give up all earthly enjoyments which interfere with our service

to God. We have an apt figure of speech, when our condition of consecration is described as being "dead with Christ." We live to please God, and not ourselves. This condition, though described figuratively, is very real, it causes a definite change in ones life. This dead condition can change if we lose the will to follow Christ in this respect. Only if we continue in the proper attitude until literal death, can we fulfill the text and "die in the Lord." This dead condition begins when we renounce our own will and sincerely promise to do the will of God. We become a true follower of Jesus, of whom it is written, "Lo, I come. . . to do thy will O God." (Heb. 10:7) His will for us, is the same as it was for Jesus -- we are to use up our human life in God's service and put to death all human hopes. We have a new mind, a new purpose in life, and this new mind with its knowledge of divine truths, is in an earthen vessel, the human body. The purpose only is new.

At one time, when a contractor built a new house, many of the needed appliances for the kitchen, especially, were brought in after the house was built -- now they have what are known as "built-ins." The kitchen range is built-in; the oven as well; frequently special cabinets are built in -- drawers in the bedrooms, etc. Our Creator built into our earthen vessel desires and cravings for earth's good things. Some come by heredity, others are developed by the individuals themselves, along with bad habits. All human desires, good and evil seek satisfaction and are a great hindrance to the new mind. The apostle describes this conflict in Gal. 5:17, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh." The Diaglott uses the word "desires" instead of "lusteth", and this is the proper thought because good earthly things oppose the new mind as well as the sinful things. This same Greek word is translated "desire" in Matt. 13:17 and Luke 22:15 and refers to a longing for proper things. Matt. 13:17, "Verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them." Luke 22:15, "And he said unto them, with desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer."

The new mind determines to do God's will; the flesh draws in the opposite direction. If we walk in the spirit, we will not fulfill or "fill full" the desires of the flesh. Some of these may be put out of our beings entirely, but not all. As long as we have the earthen vessel there will be this variance, as expressed by Paul, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." This fight against the human tendencies is called "mortifying", or putting to death the deeds of the body. (Rom. 8:13) The Greek word translated "deeds" in this text, means an "action repeated many times, which has become habitual." Some translators use the word "practices" -- put to death the practices of the flesh. Human desires are habits, continually urging fulfillment. Each time one of these cravings asserts itself and demands satisfaction, it is not to be fulfilled but opposed and put to death. Since this may occur often, we are said to die daily. 1 Cor. 15:31, "We are killed all the day long." Rom. 8:36, "We are counted as sheep for the slaughter." This is the way God views us as human beings -- our human life is to be used up and not spared. Our consecration meant

that we were willing to do this very thing. We prove the sincerity of this purpose every time we fight against the natural human tendencies. This is a daily dying, and it will not be completed until our actual death -- "Ye are dead (as human beings) but your life (as spirit beings) is hid with Christ." How necessary to consider all the different meanings of the words "dead" and "die"!

As followers of the Master, we recognize that we differ from him in that one very particular respect he was perfect -- "Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) He had no evil habits to contend with, as we do. God makes allowance for this in all who fight the depraved desires Rom. 4:8, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Isa. 61:10, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." We recognize that this applies only for those who fight against their evil habits -- they do not fulfill these desires, but oppose them. And so an important part of our daily dying is to put to death all evil, selfish and ungodly tendencies.

But opposing the evil tendencies is only a part of the Christian's dying-if this were all, then we could not really be said to be dead with him, for he had no evil habits to put to death. Dying with him would not be putting away evil things, but putting to death similar things which tempted him. For instance, as a normal and perfect human being, Jesus had desires for earth's good things; and among other things he would desire rest, peace and justice. According to Mark 6, beginning with verse 31, our Lord sought rest on this occasion by attempting to get away from the multitude. Apparently this was not God's will for him. Yet he did not complain; rather he had compassion on the multitude; and he began to teach them many things. We see here that he put to death a normal desire for rest. We are not told whether this required a great mental conflict on his part; but surely he put to death his own preference. As we read in Rom. 15:3, "For even Christ pleased not himself."

Heb. 12:3 says that Jesus "endured the contradiction of sinners." This indicates an opposition to his natural human desire for peace. The fact that he endured shows that he had a mental conflict. Then his Gethsemane experience shows clearly the variance between the New Creature and the natural human desires. He expressed his choice to God -- "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39) Jesus did have a will -- he had a preference and he expressed it in prayer. The human nature just naturally rebelled against the injustice of dying as a criminal. The new mind of our Lord was intent upon doing God's will at any cost. God's will was that he should give his flesh, his perfect humanity for the life of the world. The whole Gethsemane experience was a mental fight, but the New Creature won. The fact that Jesus had to resist his own preference, is shown by his promise in Rev. 3:21, "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." We emphasize -- we must overcome, as he also

overcame. No one could be an overcomer unless there was opposition, something to overcome.

Every Christian has experiences where the natural human desires differ from what is clearly indicated to be God's will. The mental battle is won and we overcome, when we, like Jesus, say from the heart, "Not my will, but thine be done." We have then put to death, one desire; this may have to be done repeatedly, and therefore it is a part of dying daily. Our desires may be more or less dormant, until they are stimulated by conditions around us -- seeing someone else have something that we don't have: a new car, a fine home, a beautiful garden, or a good position, or whatever. The thought can cross our minds: "Why can't I have it?" A normal human desire, suddenly comes to life. It is not a sinful desire, unless it would be motivated by envy or pride. It would be an earthly desire. To gratify such desires might require the expenditure of time, energy and money, which we had consecrated to use up in God's service. A good question to ask ourselves: "Do I really need it; and will it help me to serve God better?" Such a question helps us to maintain the "dead" condition.

Another normal human desire is to improve conditions in the world. After all, discussions are going on around us all the time, and it is natural to think that this or that side is right. If we should permit ourselves to take sides, the next step is to devote time or means to help this or that cause. This may on the surface appear to be right; but our knowledge of God's plan shows that only his Kingdom can bring a lasting solution to human problems. The best human plan falls so far short of God's purpose -- not one of them is good enough for God.

There is also the temptation to demand and to insist upon our "rights"; and every person has rights, which should be respected by others. But under Satan's rule of selfishness these are not considered. At consecration, the Christian voluntarily surrendered all his rights as a human being. Jesus taught that we should not demand our rights. (Matt. 5:38) "Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you (you who are dead to human aspirations) that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." We recognize that this could be carried to an extreme. For instance, if we did not take our paycheck, or ask for things we are entitled to, we could not live. But if to the other extreme -- we went through life demanding the full measure of our rights, we would have a wrong attitude and could never hope to be of the Kingdom class. The example we have from Jesus, is that when he was unjustly smitten, he made a simple and reasonable statement -- "if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" He did not fight for his rights, but submitted, knowing that his heavenly Father could have caused this experience to be otherwise.

Being dead with Christ means then, that we are daily opposing and killing any desires, good or evil, which we find to be out of harmony with God's will for us. The first part of Rev. 14:13 tells us then that the Christian who maintains his dead condition until actual death, has the blessing that comes to a final overcomer -- he will have his great reward. The statement "From henceforth" shows us that there is a special blessing, beginning at a certain time -- "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. . from henceforth." Vs. 14 to 16 indicate that the time is in the harvest of the Gospel age -- "and I looked and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle." In V. 15 he is told, "Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe." The Harvest is the end of the age (Matt. 13:39). This harvest separates the wheat and the tares, the end of the Gospel age. The time for the "special blessing" of the dead who die from henceforth is therefore in the end of the age -- the time when our Lord is invisibly present; the time before he is recognized as king, by the world. He has the golden crown, but his presence is first understood only by his watching followers. "Ye brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief."

1 Thess, 4:15 to 17 we might say divides Christians into two groups respecting time. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming (presence) of the Lord, shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up. . together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (For a more elaborate treatment of this subject, please turn to Volume VI, pages 662 and 663.)

V. 16 of 1 Thess. 4 refers to the trump of God, or trumpet of God (Diaglott-God's trumpet). The events of the sounding of the 7th trumpet are described in Rev. 11:15-19. One of these events is to give reward to the saints. (V. 18) This reward is "being changed" into immortal beings at the First Resurrection. Those who die in the Lord, after the Lord returns, are those who do not sleep in death, but are changed instantly from the human to the divine nature. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth -- because they are changed instantly; and the text also states: "That they rest from their labors, but their works follow with them." (Diaglott, word for word.) Those who die in the Lord "From henceforth" continue in the same work that they were doing before death. The laborious feature will have ended -- they now have divine bodies that never become weary.

Isa. 40:28, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." Those still in the flesh are said to "labor in the word and doctrine" -- when they die, they rest from labor, but their

work is not interrupted, because the moment of death is the moment of change to incorruption. We have noted that the context of Rev. 14:13 shows that the time of fulfillment is this harvest, and that our Lord is the chief reaper. At the second advent the truth serves as a sickle to separate the wheat from the tares. There can be no doubt that the glorified saints are with Jesus supervising the harvest work. So it is that all the saints -- those on both sides of the veil are engaged in the same work. As each one finishes his course, he is changed into a divine being: his work continues, but with greatly expanded power.

The divine commission of Isa. 61:1-3 includes the proclamation of the "Day of vengeance of our God." Jesus, as we remember omitted this part of the text, when quoting, because this day had not arrived in his time. (Luke 4) Those who live in the harvest of the Gospel age are to fulfill this, because at this time it is God's day of vengeance. Rev. 14:17-20 pictures this as the harvest of the vine of the earth being cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God. Both harvests are connected with the time when those who die in the Lord, are blessed from henceforth.

It should be noted that the Lord's people this side of the veil do not execute the vengeance of God. We can proclaim the fact (at reasonable times -- in season to the hearer) that this is the time when God will execute it. This vengeance is particularly upon those who have been oppressors of others. "The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up: and he shall be brought low." Isa. 2:12.

Under God's providence, the Jubilee message concerning economic inequalities has great power. It appeals to the natural selfishness of those who have less of the good things of life. It causes them to demand more and more of their real and fancied rights. These demands are more than can be met by the leaders of the present governments. This weakens the present systems and will contribute to the eventual collapse of the kingdoms of this world.

Isa. 42:13 shows that God "Shall stir up jealousy like a man of war." It is true that military leaders stir up dissensions in the ranks of the enemy whenever possible. It is an effective method of weakening and destroying the enemy. The present evil world under Satan's domination is and always has been full of inequalities. Those who have had the advantage over others have been able to maintain their exalted positions. But now conditions are changing -- the "have-nots" are being made jealous of the "haves" and are demanding more. God is doing this by the simple process of causing truth along all lines to be proclaimed in the world -- the increase of knowledge on every subject. The whole message of the kingdom is proclaimed, but the world hears only that which makes manifest the fact that they have been deprived of their rights. This stirs up their jealousy, and they do the destroying work themselves. Declaring the day of vengeance of God, is

thus a powerful message, mainly because it is his time for the destruction to take place. Since Rev. 14:13 shows that the saints who die in the Lord do not cease their work, it must be true that those who are on the other side are working to the same end, the proclaiming of the Kingdom message. Since the glorified church has divine power, we can conclude that the greatest part of the work is done by them. Our part may be very small and only informative, but it is the Lord's work. We rejoice in our privilege. Let us continue to die daily, by putting to death any human desire which interferes with our activity in doing his will. If we endure to the end in our good fight we will die in the Lord and be changed instantly into his likeness. We will then be forever with the Lord.