

None Shall Say, “I Am Sick”

*“What man is he
that liveth, and
shall not see
death? shall he
deliver his soul
from the hand of
the grave?”
—Psalm 89:48*

MANY IN THE WORLD

were surprised when, on February 11, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, to be effective on February 28, 2013. His decision to step down will make him the first pope to relinquish the office prior to death since Pope Gregory XII in 1415, who did so in order to end a division within the church. Benedict is the first pope to do so on his own initiative since Pope Celestine V in 1294, or 719 years ago. His decision was unexpected, and the stated reason was that of declining health due to age—he is currently 85. In his resignation announcement, he noted “lack of strength of mind and body,” but declared that he would continue to serve the church “through a life dedicated to prayer.” Benedict was elected pope in 2005 and, at the age of 78, was the oldest person to have been elected since Pope Clement XII in 1730.

NONE ESCAPE DEATH

Our purpose in citing the above event is not to judge—positively or negatively—the work or service of those who are considered by millions of people as leaders of society, whether religious, political, or otherwise. God is the great judge of all, and we are thankful that it is so. Rather, we find that this event, like so many others which involve people well-known in the world, points out beyond a shadow of a doubt a universal fact—all who walk this earth are human, suffer from various maladies of mind and body, and eventually succumb to the great enemy of death.

As our opening text so well expresses, no one escapes this enemy—not the pope, not a single leader of any nation, not the most successful businessman or woman, not even the most intelligent doctor. All get sick, and all eventually die. In the words of our text, no one can deliver himself from “the hand of the grave.” The psalmist, in another place, says that no man “can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” (Ps. 49:7) On the surface, these verses seem to paint a bleak picture for the human race, but let us look further into God’s Word.

The Scriptures tell us not only that all die, but that the reason for death is that all sin, and that this combined condition of “sin” and “death” go all the way back to father Adam. The Apostle Paul makes this connection for us, when he says, “Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom. 5:12) Earlier in the same epistle, Paul made these plain

statements: "There is none righteous, no, not one . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.—Rom. 3:10,23

ONE PERFECT MAN

In the six-thousand years of man's history on earth, only one individual has ever walked this planet and not suffered and died as a result of sin, sickness, or disease. That individual was Jesus. Though he died as a man, and at the young age of thirty-three, it was not because of any sinful condition in his being, or of any sickness or disease. He was perfect, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) He "knew no sin." (II Cor. 5:21) Jesus died for none of these reasons, but rather because he voluntarily laid down his life—literally—in sacrifice to redeem father Adam and, hence, Adam's posterity, from the penalty of sin, which is death. Jesus stated that his was to be a voluntary death, when he said, "I lay down my life. . . . No man [nothing] taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."—John 10:17,18

It has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus laid down his life in sacrifice as man's redeemer, yet we continue to see sin, sickness, and most assuredly, death, all around us. When and how will the benefits of his great sacrifice be made available to this "groaning creation?" While it is true that man has learned much about the human body, and has been able, through a great increase in knowledge, to prolong man's life expectancy substantially from what it was just a few generations ago, death still eventually comes to all.

MAN'S AMAZING ORGANISM

Indeed, the design and functioning of the human body, even in its current imperfect condition, speaks of its grand Creator, Almighty God. There is not an organ of the body but what reveals a sublime wisdom in its design. The remarkably engineered heart has multiple valves and unique muscle designs that permit a squeezing out of blood, and in a twenty-four hour period pumps literally thousands of gallons. The eye excels any camera in that it automatically focuses and immediately adjusts the pupil, or aperture, to the desired opening for the amount of light present. The highly sensitized retina of the eye, seemingly crowded with millions of nerve endings, transmits to the brain its recorded images in glorious color and exactness. The stomach and digestive organs accept the food we eat, extracting and producing a multiplicity of needed chemicals and minerals. The blood, the body's "transportation system," carries out its efficient and complex distribution process—iodine to the thyroid gland, calcium to the bones, potassium here, and phosphorus there—until every minute area is serviced with every needed chemical and mineral. When nutrients are delivered, waste products are also picked up and then disposed of, and so the wonderful and continuous process proceeds. Truly, only "the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."—Ps. 14:1

In spite of this wonderful body and brain that man has, it is evident, as previously noted, that much is still lacking to be a better functioning organism. Man is a member of a sick and dying race. Regardless of the excitement created when

new medical discoveries and advances are made, the overall picture is still the same—man gets sick and eventually dies. True, worldwide life expectancy has increased dramatically in a little over two centuries. In 1789, it was an almost unbelievably low thirty-five years. By 1955, it had nearly doubled to sixty-six years of age. In 2012, the median worldwide life expectancy was estimated at seventy-four years of age. However, regardless of increased life expectancy, in man's experience there is one chilling statistic rarely mentioned. Of all who are born, one hundred percent still die.

RECENT STATISTICS

Although advances in medicine and the treatment of many diseases have proven effective and beneficial for many, at best they have only provided a relatively short reprieve from the death sentence. Recent statistics show the percentages of man's leading death-causes are: heart, stroke, and other cardiovascular disease 29%; infectious and parasitic diseases 23%; cancer 12%; respiratory disease 6%; accidents 6%; digestive diseases 3%; and intentional injury (suicide, violence, war, etc.) 3%. All other causes of death combined are 18%. In all the efforts to conquer these causes, none has been so hopeful as to dare predict the end of death.

Notwithstanding increased life expectancy, how many who live to eighty, ninety, or even one hundred years of age, really enjoy consistently good health? Our human family has appropriately been called a "groaning creation." Throughout the world Americans have been known for generations as having enthusiasm and optimism. The usual greeting

upon meeting another is, “How are you?” with the usual answer a robust, “Fine.” However, generally it is not long after these formalities that then begins the usual mutual commiserations. Each has his or her story of aches and pains, sleepless nights, tiredness, and other frailties that have come upon us.

In addition to the somber realities concerning man’s sickness and death there are yet other facts, perhaps not so widely known, which make us cry out for the Lord to soon establish his kingdom. In the United States alone, according to the 2004 Census, an estimated 26.2% of the population ages 18 and older—about one in four adults—suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. This translates to nearly 60 million people. Of this, about 6%, or one in seventeen adults, suffer from what is termed “serious” mental illness. In addition, mental disorders, as opposed to the diseases cited above, are the leading cause of disability in the United States. If these staggering statistics exist in our country, what must be the number of mentally sick and their sorry plight in the less fortunate countries of the world?

GOD’S PROMISES

Thus, man’s efforts against disease and death, though laudable and ever-continuing, have yielded little in the way of positive, long-term results. Much more is needed, and thankfully much more has been promised by our Heavenly Father. In this we greatly rejoice, and pray indeed that the Lord’s kingdom may soon come and end earth’s weary night of suffering. It is this marvelous hope for mankind held out in the Bible which has

caused us to see our glorious God in such a loving light.

Again and again, God's infallible Word promises an end to this long reign of sin and death. He states it so positively and so tenderly. Hear his words in Isaiah 25:6,7: "In this mountain [kingdom] shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Then notice the dramatic picture language used to illustrate the lifting of ignorance and superstition which has so beclouded man: "And he will destroy in this mountain [kingdom] the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations." It is just as though our Heavenly Father pictures the earth as being covered with a great veil which has prevented the glorious, healing, life-giving sun from shining through. This figurative veil of ignorance and superstition, induced by Satan, is to be torn loose and removed. Then shall beam to every nook and cranny of this sin-sick and dying world the warm, life-giving rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Every festering sore of hate shall be healed, and every dank, dark mold of evil shall be destroyed. Even the earth itself, which has been so long contaminated, will become purified and clean.

RANSOM PROVIDED

These health-giving rays will not only bless and heal all the willing and obedient, but God further promises that the work accomplished shall be so complete that "he will swallow up death in victory." (vs. 8) We know all this will come because our blessed Lord, Christ Jesus, was willing to become a

man and take Adam's place in death. Paul tells us, "Since it was through a man that death resulted, it was also through a man that the resurrection of the dead resulted. For just as all men die by virtue of their descent from Adam, so all such as are in union with Christ will be made to live again."—I Cor. 15:21,22, *Williams Translation*

As we have already noted, man's horrible experience with sickness, death, sorrow, and evil of every kind came because Adam disobeyed. Before God, in justice, could release Adam and his race, it was necessary that someone who could be his corresponding price would willingly replace him in death. Jesus became a man for that purpose. Thus it is that in God's due time he could "swallow up death in victory" and even raise, from the sleep of death, all who had gone there because of Adam's disobedience.

TEARS WIPED AWAY

Notice, too, in the words of Isaiah's prophecy, the suggestion of God's joy in this entire matter as well as his tender love. "The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces." (Isa. 25:8) How much this sounds like the tenderness of a loving parent who has been touched with the hurt of his child and stoops to love and console. Truly, there are many tears to wipe away—the tortured minds; the lonely; the misunderstood; the tired, the sick of every conceivable kind. For all of his human children, God has watched and waited for the due time when he can "wipe away tears from off all faces."

In the same verse, Isaiah continues, "And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth." Every last vestige of the curse of sin

and death will be forever removed. There shall be no far-away outposts of sin or death, but the entire world shall be a glory to his name. To show with finality the absoluteness of this plan, our eternal God has the prophet to utter these solemn, great words: "The LORD hath spoken it."

When our glorious, infinite Creator tells us he will do something, we can be assured it will be done. At the time that our earth was being prepared for man's habitation, we read that God said, "Let there be light: and there was light." (Gen. 1:3) His word is absolute. "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—Isa. 55:10,11

THIS IS OUR GOD!

Returning to Isaiah, chapter twenty-five, we see another glorious promise that pierces the present gloom of sickness and death like a golden shaft of light. "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (vs. 9) To those who now appreciate these words, the darkness, by faith, is dispelled and the beauty of the promise leads our mental vision to see the majesty and glory of God. Even now we say, gratefully, "Lo, this is our God." Happy shall be the day when all shall

know him from the least unto the greatest, and say these same words.

These words acknowledging man's loving God have not yet been spoken by man in general. God is faithful, however, and he looks forward to the time when this shall be a reality. His loving-kindness is ready to fly to man's relief. Today we still see the sad march of all members of the human family. One by one they pass by—the lame, the sick, the unloved, the tired, the infirmed bodies and tortured minds, forlornly walking to the grave. Included in this procession is everyone—the great of this world, the leaders of nations and religions, the rich, along with the poor, the common folk, the mostly unknown millions of people who live in obscurity. None are exempt from the great enemy of death. All the efforts of man do but little to ease the rigors of this procession. Sometimes through one effort or another life is lengthened for a few years, but always there is the tomb at the end.

God, however, has promised a glorious day! Then “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.” (Isa. 33:24) “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.” (chap. 35:6) “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth,” and “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (John 5:28,29; Rev. 21:4) “Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The

flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” (Song of Sol. 2:11,12) With joy we repeat the words once again which will be spoken in that day by all people, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him.”—Isa. 25:9 ■