

## HOPEFUL THOUGHTS OF LIFE

(A Very Short and a Very Simple Funeral Sermon)

Br. Ted Smith

Dear Friends we are gathered together this afternoon to honor the memory of Sister \_\_\_\_\_. We have known one another in the Christian brotherhood for \_\_\_\_\_ years, and I got to know her quite well. I know it would be her wish that I not talk about her very much, but talk about God's plan of lovingkindness in behalf of the human race—this plan which has the ransom sacrifice of Jesus as the very central thought. What could be of more importance than an understanding of our destiny as revealed to us in the inspired book we call the Bible? This is what \_\_\_\_\_ would select as a topic in her love for God, and in her love for those who were close to her with blood ties, and in her love for all of us assembled here this afternoon.

According to the generally accepted Bible Chronology we have been on this earth for sixty-one hundred years—6,100 years; and I think we can all agree that it has been a long hard experience. Generally speaking we find life has many hardships and it all ends in the sleep of death. But life under reasonably normal conditions is indeed sweet. And that is what we want to talk about—life free of disappointments, frustrations, tears and sicknesses.

We find some very hopeful thoughts in the Scriptures and it is interesting to see how all these hopeful thoughts fit together in a connected plan that glorifies the name of our Creator and adds to our reverence for God. A knowledge of this wonderful plan gives us comfort in our times of sorrow.

Let us consider briefly a few of these hopeful thoughts of life, or hopes of a future life and see how they all fit together harmoniously. The first one that is quite clear and understandable is found in the book of Genesis, chapter 12, Verse 3, and chapter 22, verse 18. Genesis 12:3 reads this way: God said to Abraham, “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed;” and Genesis 22:18 reads (again speaking to Abraham): “in thy seed all the nations of the earth be blessed.” These words are “good news” indeed—that through Abraham and his Seed all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

Then coming down into the New Testament we find the Apostle Paul telling us that Christ is Abraham's seed; and not only that, but those who belong to Christ are the seed of Abraham. This is found in Gal. 3:16 and 29: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” So all the families of the earth are to be blessed through Abraham's seed—i.e. Christ and his church.

Then in 1 Tim. 2:4 we learn that God will have all men come to a knowledge of the Truth. What a grand thought this is that God intends all to eventually come to a knowledge of the truth. And then in the next two verses, Paul writes, “For there is one God, and One Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.” What a comforting thought this is that all are ransomed and in due time this ransom will be testified to all—how this glorifies the lovingkindness of our Heavenly Father!

The Apostle John in 1 John 2:2 says that Christ “is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Here redemption is clearly shown to be in two parts—for us, the church, and also for the “sins of the whole world.”

Jesus speaks about a way leading to life—this is found in Matt. 7:13 and 14: “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.” We all know about the broad way to destruction, because we are all on it, because we are Adam’s progeny. But Jesus reveals to us that there is a Narrow Way to life and that it has a strait gate, a difficult gate, and few there would be who would find it. This is an interesting thought indeed that there is a Narrow Way to life, and that only a few find it.

Examining another section of God’s Word we find another way of life spoken of. This is found in the book of Isaiah—it is called a highway—the highway of holiness; and the way will be so plain that even a fool could not err therein. This is found in the 35th chapter of Isaiah, verses 8 and 10: “And an highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Truly we have a bright cluster of joyful teachings concerning a better time coming, and from these we draw comfort and hope, and give thanks to our Heavenly Father in reverence and awe. However, the Scriptures exhort us to rightly divide the Scriptures and not mix up earthly promises with heavenly promises. I think all who study God’s Word carefully will agree that the promises to the followers of Christ, the church, are heavenly. Other promises of life, found in the Old Testament are clearly earthly. Only when we see the distinction between heavenly promises and earthly promises will we understand God’s plan of Redemption for mankind through the shed blood of Jesus—“a ransom for all.”

For a moment, let us consider a prophecy that is confined to earthly blessings. This is found in the 35th chapter of Isaiah: “And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.” “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.”

And Isaiah 2:4 adds this testimony: “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” How grateful we are for this delightful prophecy—that the time is coming when men shall no longer be warring with one another and will use their energies in peaceful pursuits and love to God and to one another.

So then we see that the Bible has heavenly promises for the followers of Christ, and earthly promises for others. How do we harmonize these promises? How do we understand that some are to share with Christ in heavenly blessings, and others are to have earthly blessings?

Certain key thoughts are given to us in the teachings of the apostles. Perhaps the most important key thought is the teaching that the followers of Christ are called the elect. Are we to take from this that the non-elect are set aside and suffer a horrible future, or are destroyed in the second death? No, we are happy to say that we believe the Scriptures to teach that the elect are chosen for a particular purpose, and that purpose is the blessing of the non-elect.

You perhaps remember our quotation from Gal. 3:29 where it is stated that those who belong to Christ are Abraham’s seed along with Christ. And we remember what it was said in the book of Genesis that the seed of Abraham was to bless all the families of the earth. This is accurately illustrated in our day when we have elections—we vote for candidates to perform services in our behalf. So it is with the church of Christ—they, with Christ, their Head, are the elect, and, together with Christ they reign a thousand years to bless the nations, as promised to Abraham—“in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”—the non-elect.

This was the religious belief of our Sister \_\_\_\_\_. Years ago we used to gather in her home and discuss these joyful themes as we studied the Bible together; and many is the time I heard her say: “how wonderful is our God; let us be faithful to the Truth to the very end.” And so this afternoon I am voicing the sentiments of our dear Sister \_\_\_\_\_ as her final testimony—of love to God, love to Christ, and love for God’s Holy Word.

But there is something else that needs to be explained and so I continue our Sister’s testimony. If those who are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus are called the elect

and they are to bless the non-elect, then we can see the reason for such severe tests placed upon the followers of Christ. If they are to be used in the Kingdom of Christ to bless mankind in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, then they must be thoroughly tested and trained in righteousness.

When Christ and His Bride are judging and instructing all the families of the earth they will adhere strictly to the principles of justice and righteousness and will in no way show favoritism to the unworthy. The church of Christ must learn these important principles in this life and become crystallized in the character-likeness of Christ.

The Judgment Day for mankind is to be a thousand years long, as stated in 2 Peter 3:8; and that it is to be a desirable time is suggested by the language of Acts 17:31: “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Yes, God has given man assurance that Christ the appointed one will judge the world in righteousness, and how men will rejoice when Christ is on the throne and on the Judgment bench and know that they will be judged according to the principles of love and righteousness.

In Psalm 98:9 we read of the same time: “With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.” We note the exultant prophetic utterance of David in 1 Chron. 16:31-34: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice and let men say among the nations, Jehovah reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; let the fields rejoice, and all that are therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing aloud at the presence of Jehovah, because he cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto Jehovah, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever.” This is linking up God’s mercy with the time when God judgeth the earth. Only those who do not have the right spirit will despise the thousand-year judgment day. It may be surprising to some to know that the judgment day, as far as the nations are concerned, has begun already. This is evident as the hidden things of injustice and iniquity are being brought to light and exposed to public scrutiny.

While the Christian is being tested and schooled in character, he enjoys special blessings from the hand of God. The Christian is imperfect the same as everybody else; but if he has the right spirit, he knows he has the Heavenly Father’s favor; for he knows that the Heavenly Father seeth not as man seeth—God looketh upon the heart, while man looks upon the outward appearance. This is something our Sister rejoiced in constantly—she was acceptable, because she was in Christ, and had her imperfections covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness. When a Christian falls short he has Jesus as his Advocate and obtains forgiveness when he confesses his faults and corrects his mistakes as much as he possibly can. As John says in 1 John 2:1: “And if any man, sin, we have an advocate

with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteousness.” An advocate is an attorney who stands at our side and pleads our cause.

Another blessing enjoyed by the Christian is the assurance of Rom. 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” We believe, and this was one of the strong beliefs of our Sister, that God’s wisdom and power are adequate to meet all conditions for our eternal good. And when the Christian sees the conditions in the world which are so terrifying, he can remember the words of Jesus that there will never be a time of trouble like this and that by the elect, these days of trouble will be terminated.

As a note of personal tribute to our Sister we quote a verse of poetry—she was “within.”

### THE WORD OF TRUTH

The Word of Truth is like a stained-glass window rare,  
We stand outside and gaze, but see no beauty there,  
No fair design, naught but confusion we behold;  
'Tis only from within the glory will unfold,  
And he who would drink in the rapture of the view  
Must climb the winding stair, the portal enter through.  
The sacred door of Truth’s cathedral is most low,  
And all who fain would enter there the knee must bow  
In deep humility. But once inside, the light  
Of day streams through and makes each color heavenly bright,  
The Master’s great design we see, our hands we raise  
In reverent ecstasy of wonder, love and praise!

(Poems of Dawn, page 6.)

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Many of the Lord’s people have expressed the thought that a funeral sermon is their final opportunity to show love to the Heavenly Father for a knowledge of the wonderful plan of lovingkindness for the human family through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. Some, who are isolated have written out a funeral sermon in long hand or with a typewriter, making request that such sermon be read by someone when no ecclesia would be available to take charge.