

DEATH, A SLEEP

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A SERMON
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“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”
1 Thessalonians 4:13

[On January 31, 1892, the beloved preacher, “after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep.” That verse was the text of the sermon (#2243) published on the day of his funeral, to which Mrs. Spurgeon gave the title, “His Own Funeral Sermon.” Sixteen years have elapsed since his home-going, but C. H. Spurgeon “yet speaketh” by means of the printed page, and so many unpublished manuscripts still remain that the publication of the sermons can still be continued for several years. Will all who can help in increasing the circulation of them communicate with Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster Buildings, London.]

THERE may be some few extraordinary cases “where ignorance is bliss,” and where “’tis folly to be wise,” but for the most part, ignorance is the mother of misery, and if we had more knowledge, we would find it a tower of strength against many fears and alarms which beget sadness and sorrows in dark untutored minds. True it is that the utmost diligence of the student cannot shield his body or his mind from fatigue and distress.

In guarding against one class of ills, we may become exposed to another, as Solomon testifies that “much study is a weariness of the flesh,” and again, “in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.” Still, let it be remembered that “wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense,” in the increase of either we may augment our cares, yet in the increase of both we think there is a remunerative profit.

But I would commend to you a wisdom which springs not up from earth, but comes down from heaven. He that is rich towards God knows that “the blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it,” and he that is made wise unto salvation, has received that wisdom which “giveth life to them that have it.” If we had more celestial wisdom, I believe we should have more of heavenly joy, and less of carnal sorrow.

Many a doctrine of the Gospel becomes the means of sadness and misery to the heart simply because it is not understood. Ignorance of the Bible often troubles men’s hearts and consciences, and prevents them from finding that peace of God which a little more knowledge of it would be sure to give them. And I am certain that ignorance or forgetfulness of many of the exceedingly great and precious promises of God, and of the marvelous things He has engaged to do for His people, often causes our eyes to flow with tears and our hearts to be overwhelmed with suffering. The more a Christian knows of his religion, the better for his peace, and for his happiness.

The apostle says, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren,” *he* knew that was an ill condition, and *we* may well shun it. Depend upon this, the more thoroughly you understand the Gospel, the more you will find that the Gospel blesses you and makes you happy. Each word that eternal wisdom speaks is pure. Give heed then to the sure word of Scripture, and so shall you journey as with chart in hand, escaping a thousand dangers to which benighted travelers are exposed, and enjoying a thousand delights which they cannot discern. But alas for those who walk in darkness! They have nothing to cheer or enliven, but everything to frighten and terrify them.

Leaving this preliminary point, for I trust you seek to avoid all ignorance, and ask God to lead you into the knowledge of all truth, I proceed now to the special application of my text, as the Holy Ghost

has designed to place a lamp in the sepulcher, where darkness was wont to hold an undisputed sway. And here we have, first, *an affecting metaphor*—a metaphor for death, “them which are asleep.” Secondly, there is *a solemn distinction*. There are some that die without hope, and there are others for whom we sorrow not as for them that are without hope, and then thirdly, there is *a very gentle exhortation*—not to sorrow for those who sleep in Jesus, “even as others which have no hope.”

I. So, in the first place, here is A MOST AFFECTING SIMILE, “them which are asleep.”

Scripture continually uses the term “sleep” to express death. Our Savior did so, He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” and so well, with such an evident and appropriate truthfulness, did He describe death as being a sleep, that His disciples mistook the sense of His words, and said, “Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.” But Jesus spoke not of the transient sleep of the weary, but of the deep slumber of death, and very frequently, even in the Old Testament, you find it said that certain persons “slept with their fathers; and were buried in a sepulchre.”

Nor did they count that sleep a hopeless end of life, but as David said, “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,” they expected to awake from that slumber into which they believed death did cast their bodies. In the New Testament the same emblem is continually used, and it is very pleasant to remember that in the old catacombs of Rome, where the bodies of many saints were buried, it is continually found inscribed on their graves, “She sleeps,” “He sleeps in Jesus,” “He shall wake up one day,” and similar epitaphs, which mark the firm belief of Christians that sleep was a very fine and beautiful picture of death.

Allow me to guard against an evil supposition that may spring up here. When death is called a sleep, it is not because the soul sleeps, that, we are told by Holy Scripture, rises at once to heaven. The soul of the saint is found at once before the throne of God. It is the body which is said to sleep. The soul sleeps not, absent from the body, it is present with the Lord, it stretches its wings, and flies away up to yonder realm of joy, and there, reveling in delight, bathing itself in bliss, it finds a rest from the turmoil of earth infinitely better than any rest in sleep. It is the body, then, that sleeps, and the body only. I will try and tell you why we think the metaphor is used of the sleep of the body.

In the first place, because *sleep is a suspension of the faculties, but not a destruction of the body*. When we see anyone naturally asleep, we believe that body will wake up again. We do not suppose that those eyes will be sealed up in perpetual darkness, that those bones and that flesh will lie dormant, never more to feel the consciousness of being, or stir with the impulse of life. No, we expect to see the functions of life resumed, the eyelids open to admit the cheering rays of light, and the limbs to become again exercised with activity.

So, when we bury our dead in their graves, we are taught to believe that they are asleep. Our faith, (which is warranted by the Word of God), discerns in the corruption of death a suspension of the powers of the body rather than an annihilation of the matter itself. The earthly house of this tabernacle must be dissolved, but it cannot be destroyed. Though the bones be scattered to the four winds of heaven, yet at the call of the Lord God, they shall come together again, bone to bone. Though the eyes be first glazed, and then devoured from their sockets, they shall be surely restored, that each saint in his own flesh may see God.

In this confidence we deposit the body of each departed saint in the grave as in a bed. We doubt not that God will guard the dust of the precious sons and daughters of Zion. We believe that in the resurrection, there shall be a perfect identity of the body. You may call it unphilosophical if you please, but you cannot show me that it is unbiblical. Science cannot demonstrate it, you say, but then science cannot disprove it. Reason stands abashed, while Revelation lifts her trumpet-tongue and exclaims, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.”

Look not, then, on the corpse of your brother or your sister in Christ, beloved, to take an eternal farewell. Say rather, “When I stretch myself on my couch at night, I *hope* to wake at the first call of the

busy morn. But I not only hope, I *am sure* that this sleeping heir of immortality shall awake from the sound slumbers of his sepulchral repose at the dawn of the heavenly Bridegroom's appearing." "Ah!" says one, "'twas but an hour or two ago I was in the closed chamber where my little baby is laid out, I lifted the coffin lid, and looked at its dear little placid face, and I can quite believe what you say—death is a sleep—it seemed just like it." "Nay," says another, "it was only yesterday that I was in a London graveyard, appalled with the sight of skulls and bare, disjointed bones, and I can never look upon death in the way you represent."

Now then, my friends, mark this well, for I can give one reply to you both—it is not by the exercise of your sense, but by the exercise of your faith, that you are to get this blessed hope. You might bitterly gaze on the face of the dead long enough before you would catch a symptom of returning life, you might grope about in the dark damp vault long enough before a ray of light would show you an avenue by which the captives can be liberated from their gloomy cells. No, no, you must visit the tomb of Jesus, you must go and "see the place where the Lord lay," then you will soon perceive how the stone is rolled away, and how to rise again is made possible and certain too.

Moreover, *the term "sleep" is beautifully used to express the quiet of the body.* It rests from labor. Look on the sleeper. He has been weary, he has toiled all day long, but there is no weariness now. He breathes softly, sometimes a dream may disturb him, but he is not weary, he is resting in the unconsciousness of slumber.

It is often pleasing to look upon the face of a weary sleeper. Have you never passed along a country lane, and there by the roadside, seen the harvestman as he is resting awhile from his toils, lying down upon the bank? What a heavy sleep he has, and what a blessed smile there is on his countenance while he is enjoying that rest!

Such is the natural sleep of the body, whence comes the metaphor of my text, and is not this sleep of death a resting after toil? The poor limbs are weary, they are now stretched in the grave, and covered over with the green sod, that they may not hear the noise above their heads, nor be disturbed by the busy din. They are put in their quiet abodes, down deep there in the earth, that none may alarm them, and now let the cannon roar over their tomb, let the thunder shake the sky, let the lightning flash, no sight nor sound can startle them, or cause them dreams.

In such still chambers of retirement, their troubles are now over. "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." The body has gone through its battle, the warrior sleeps, the conqueror rests, his brow shall soon be decked with laurels, the very brow which now slumbers in the tomb awhile shall yet rise again to wear the crown of everlasting life, but now it rests awhile till the preparations are complete for the triumphant entry into the kingdom of God, when Christ shall come to receive body and soul into their everlasting resting place.

Note again, *sleep is used as a figure for death, to show us the entire unconcern which the dead feel concerning anything which is going on below.* The sleeper knows nothing of what is doing. The thief may be in the house, but he knows it not; there is a storm, but he slumbers, and knows no terror; there may happen a thousand accidents abroad, or even in the chamber where he rests, but so long as sleep can hold him fast, he shall be entirely unconcerned about them, and shall not notice them.

And such, beloved, is the case with the dead. Their bodies, at least, are entirely free from concern. Empires may totter, kingdoms fall, and mighty revolutions shake the world, but none of these things will—

***"Ever make their hearts ache, or
Break the spell of their profound repose."***

There may be a falling away, a backsliding in the church, but the minster in the grave wots it not, the tongue of Wickliffe shall not move with stern rebuke, the eye of Knox shall not flash with indignation. Yea, and each bodily organ through which the mind was wont to reveal itself is now closed, "So man

lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

There is a yet sweeter view of this metaphor which I will now point out to you. *Sleep*, you know, *is a means of refreshment*, by the recruiting of our exhausted strength to fit us for a fresh exercise of our faculties when we awake. Such, too, is death. The sleep of death is requisite as a preparation for heaven, so far as the body is concerned. The soul must be prepared by a blessed change wrought upon it in this time-state, but the body awaits its full redemption until the resurrection. Though I may not follow the metaphor in the process by which the change is wrought, I can believe it will quite hold good in the result.

The refreshing of the body is of course gradually brought about during the hours of sleep, just as changes are successively going on in the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. The awaking of the one, and the sprouting of the other, in health and vigor, result from causes that take place in the interval. But I am not prepared to say that it is exactly so with the sleeping dust of man’s earthly tabernacle.

The greedy worm that devours it, the general corruption that preys upon it, and the foul earth with which it mingles, may consume that which is corruptible, but these can have no power to refine the nature, or to produce the glorious likeness to be borne by the saints. You must always guard against straining a figure, especially when, by so doing, you would make it contradict the plain didactic teachings of the Scriptures.

We do not look down into the grave as if it were a refining pot to purify our nature, or a bath in which the garments of mortality are to be cleansed, but we look upward to heaven, from whence the Savior shall come, “our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Once more, there is a very precious word in connection with this sleep which we must not overlook. At the fourteenth verse it says that they “sleep in Jesus.” Sweet thought! This teaches us that death does not dissolve the union which subsists between the believer and Christ. When the body dies, it does not cease to be a part of Christ! “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” said the apostle to those who were still living in the world, and now, as to those whose earthly course is done, our departed friends “sleep in Jesus,” they are as much in Christ now as they were when upon earth, and their bodies, which were precious to the Lord, and preserved as the apple of His eye, are as precious to Him now as they ever were.

It was once their delight to have communion with Jesus in *His* death and resurrection, as knowing themselves one with Him when He died and rose again, and not less surely did Jesus hold fellowship with them in *their* death, making Himself known to them when they endured their last struggle. How often have we seen the eye brighten up with an almost supernatural brilliance just before it was closed on all beneath the skies! How often have we seen the hand raised with the parting expression of triumph, and then laid motionless by the side! How often has the presence of the Beloved sustained the frail tenement of the expiring Christian till he has defied death “to quench his immortality, or shake his trust in God!”

And mark how the saints in Jesus, when their bodies sleep in peace, have perpetual fellowship with Him—ay, better fellowship than we can enjoy. We have but the transitory glimpse of His face, they gaze upon it every moment. We see Him “through a glass, darkly,” they behold Him “face to face.” We sip of the brook by the way, they plunge into the very ocean of unbounded love. We look up sometimes, and see our Father smile, look whenever they may, His face is always full of smiles for them. We get some drops of comfort, but they get the honeycomb itself. They have their cup filled with new wine, running over with perennial, unalloyed delights. They are full of peace and joy forever. They “sleep in Jesus.”

Beloved, such a description of death makes us wish to sleep too. O Lord, let us go to sleep with the departed! O happy hour when a clod of the valley shall be our pillow! Though it is so hard, we shall not

be affected by it. Happy hour, when earth shall be our bed! Cold shall be the clay, but we shall not know it, we shall slumber, and we shall rest. The worm shall hold carnival within our bones, and corruption shall riot o'er our frame, but we shall not feel it. Corruption can but feed on the corruptible, mortality can but prey upon the mortal.

Oh, let me rest! Come, night, and let me slumber! Come, my last hour! Let me bow myself upon the bed! Come, death, oh, come lightly to my couch! Ay, strike if you will, but your stroke is the loving touch that makes my body slumber! Happy, happy, they who die in the Lord!

II. Now, secondly, here is A SOLEMN DISTINCTION.

All men die, but all men die not alike. There are two sorts of death. I speak not now of the inferior animals, of them we never read in Scripture that they sleep, but I speak of MAN, concerning whom it is certain that "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." There is the death of the righteous, which is peaceful, happy, and joyous beyond expression! in its future consequences, there is, moreover, the death of the wicked, sad in itself, but doleful indeed in its inevitable results throughout a dread eternity.

Come, then, beloved, let us consider this distinction. There are some, we must infer from this text, for whom we can sorrow as those for whom we have no hope, while there are others, for whom we are told we may not thus sorrow, concerning their death we have every hope and every joy.

Turning for a moment to the heathen nations, we do not wonder that there is a great deal of grief expressed at their funerals, that they hire women who pluck their hair, make hideous noises, and distress their bodies with all kinds of unnatural contortions in order to express the utmost agony, while the relatives and friends cover themselves with sackcloth and ashes, and spend their time in weeping and wailing and lamentations. We do not wonder that such customs should prevail, and be handed down among those who have no knowledge of a resurrection. They suppose that when the body is consigned to the tomb, they shall never see it again, so we do not marvel that they should cry—

*“Weep for the dead, and bewail her;
Weep for the dead, and bewail her;
She is gone; she is gone;
We shall see her no more—
Weep for the dead, and bewail her!”*

You see, there is no hope in their case to mitigate their woe, but in a nominally Christian land, although we are persuaded that all men will have a resurrection, yet how many die of whom we have no hope! I mean to say, we have, in the first place, no hope of ever meeting them again. We frequently sing in our Sunday school—our little children sing—

*“Oh, that will be joyful,
Joyful, joyful!
When we meet to part no more!”*

But there is another side to that truth—

*“Oh, that will be doleful,
Doleful, doleful!
When we part to meet no more!”*

When our wicked friends die, if we are righteous, we must remember that we shall never meet them again. We may behold them, but it will be a hideous sight, we may see them as Lazarus saw the rich man in hell, we may behold them with the great gulf fixed between us, but remember that the last shake of the hand with an ungodly relative is an everlasting farewell, that last whisper of sympathy on the

dying bed is indeed final, we shall never address them with another soft word of comfort, never again shall we call them friends, we are sundered now forever. Death, like some mighty earthquake, shakes two hearts apart, which seemed to be indissolubly united, and a great gulf of fire and wrath shall separate them. One in heaven, and the other in hell—they shall never meet again, there is no hope of it.

Some of you we could not bear to lose, yet, if you fall asleep, we shall with holy assurance consign you to your grave and say, “Lord, we thank Thee that it has pleased Thee to take to Thyself our beloved brother,” yet, alas, there are many here—oh! we pray God that they may not die, for we know we should never see them again in peace, and joy, and happiness.

There are some of you, now within the reach of my voice—judge ye of whom I speak—concerning whom, if you were now to depart, we might say, as David did, “O my son, my son, Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son!” If you were now to depart, we might indeed take up a very bitter cry, we might ask the owl and the bittern, with their dismal hootings, to assist our lamentations, we should have need to weep for you, not because your bodies were dead, but because your *souls* were cast away into unutterable torment.

O sirs, if some of you were to die, it would be your mother’s grief, for she would bitterly reflect that you were gnashing your teeth in fell despair, she would recollect that you were beyond the reach of prayer, cast away from all hope and from all refuge, that she could never see you more—her destiny to be forever with her Lord in heaven, but your doom to be forever shut out!

Young men and women, ay, and all of you who have had pious friends who have gone before, would you not like to meet them before the eternal throne? Can you bear the dread thought, that you are separated from some of them forever, because you are not the Lord’s children, neither do you seek the things that belong to your peace? I think you wish to meet them there, do you not? But you never shall, except you tread the steps they trod, and walk the road they loved.

If your hearts are not towards Jesus, if your souls are not given to Him, how can you—for if your way is not the same, your end must differ. You shall not meet at the goal of heaven, unless you meet at the wicket gate on earth, enter in by the strait gate, and go along the strait and narrow road.

Oh, if some of you were about to die, your minister would have to go to your bedside and say, “Adieu, I shall never see you more,” and were you to look up, and say, “what, sir—no more?” he might answer, “I have seen you many a time in God’s house, we have sung together, we have prayed together, we have worshipped together in the same sanctuary, but it is all over now, I shall never see you more!” “What, never, Minister? Never hear your voice again?” “No, never, unless you are in Christ now, farewell forever!”

O poor soul, what a sorrowful thing to shake hands forever, to bid good-bye forever—one to descend to endless flames, and the other to mount to realms of everlasting bliss! We may, indeed, sorrow for them, if we have no hope of ever meeting them again.

But we should not grieve so much about not meeting them again, if we knew that they were happy, even though we should never see them, but then, for those who die without Christ, we sorrow because we have no hope that they have any happiness. Or even if they were now in misery, and we might cherish the thought that they would one day escape, we should not then sorrow for them, as those that have no hope.

But alas! we recollect that our lost friends are lost forever, we recollect that there is no shadow of a hope for them, when the iron gate of hell is once closed upon them, it shall never be unbarred again, to give them free exit, when once shut up within those walls of sweltering flame which girdle the fiery gulf, there is no possibility of flight, we recollect that they have “forever” stamped upon their chains, “forever” carved in deep lines of despair upon their hearts.

It is the hell of hell that everything there lasts forever. Here, time wears away our griefs, and blunts the keen edge of sorrow, but there, time never mitigates the woe. Here, the sympathy of loving kindred, in the midst of sickness or suffering, can alleviate our pain, but there, the mutual upbraidings and reproaches of fellow sinners give fresh stings to torment too dreadful to be endured. Here, too, when

nature's last palliative shall fail, to die may be a happy release, a man can count the weary hours till death shall give him rest, but oh! remember, there is no death in hell, death, which is a monster on earth, would be an angel in hell. But the terrible reality is this, "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Must we go one step further? It is terrible work to deliver these warnings, but it would be more terrible still to hide any truth, however bitter. When we have uttered a pitiful lament for heathen nations, and when we have spoken with deeper emotion of the profane, the profligate, and the despisers of God, we have not done. These have not the semblance of peace in their own breasts.

But alas! alas! there are many who die in the delusion of a false peace. What avails it that they uttered pious sentiments with their lips if their hearts were not changed? What though they received "the bread and wine" in nature's extremity? Will the sacramental opiate serve them, instead of the inward witness of reconciliation to God? Oh, hear this, you that are at ease, listen, all you whose religion stands in outward forms, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning." I confess to you that the metaphor which charms me in the one case appalls me in the other, so great is the distinction among the sleepers.

Look at the man who has sought to be justified by the works of the law, or in some way perverted the Gospel of Christ. With a fatal lull of conscience he nestles down securely. "As when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." He sleeps the deep sleep of death, prepared, as he supposes, to meet the judge. When he awakes, the spell shall be dissolved. The terrible sentence, "Depart," awaits him.

O beloved, I tremble to think that a man may go up with jaunty step to the threshold of heaven only to be cast down to the nethermost pit! As you stand among the graves of your departed friends, I beseech you to examine yourselves. Only as you can say, "To me to live is Christ," have you a right to add, "and to die is gain."

But now there is the case of the Christian. Is it not matter for consolation and holy joy, with some of us, that concerning beloved friends of ours who now sleep quietly in their graves, we have not to sorrow as those who have no hope? The death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord. On their account we have cause rather to rejoice than to weep.

And why? Because we hope that they are safely housed in heaven, yea, more, we have the firm persuasion that already their redeemed spirits have flown up to the eternal throne. We believe that they are at this moment joining in the hallelujahs of paradise, feasting on the fruits of the tree of life, and walking by the side of the river, the streams whereof make glad the heavenly city of our God. We know they are supremely blessed, we think of them as glorified spirits above, who are "forever with the Lord."

We have that hope, and then we have another hope concerning them—we hope that, though we have buried them, they shall rise again. In the verse following our text it is written, "Them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." We rejoice that not only do "they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them," but that after they have rested a little while, their bodies shall rise again. We know that their Redeemer lives, and we are certain that He will, at the latter day, stand upon the earth, and that they shall stand on the earth with Him.

We rejoice that the dead in Christ shall rise first—that they shall come on that day when, "with clouds descending," "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them who believe." We look for a day when buried bodies shall be living frames once more, we expect that glazed eyes shall again be radiant with light, we believe that dumb lips shall yet sing, that deaf ears shall yet hear, and that lame feet shall yet leap like the hart.

We are looking for the time when we shall meet the saints in their very bodies, and shall know them too. It is our hope that they shall rise again, and that we shall meet them, and shall know them. I trust you all firmly believe that you will recognize your friends in heaven. I consider the doctrine of the non-recognition of our friends in heaven a marvelously absurd one, I cannot conceive how there can be any

communion of saints in heaven unless there be mutual recognition. We could not hold communion with unknown beings, if we knew not who they were, how should we be able to join their company? Moreover, we are told that we shall “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” I suppose we shall know those blessed patriarchs when we sit down with them, and if we know them, there is but one step to the supposition that we shall know all the general assembly.

Moreover, there will be but very little difficulty in discovering them because every seed has its own body, by which we are taught that every body, being different from any other body when sown, will, when it rises in a spiritual fashion, be in like manner different from any other. And although the spiritual body may have none of the lineaments upon its face like we have, and no marks as we have, because it will be far more glorious and splendid, yet it will have so much identity that we, being instructed, shall be able to say of it, “This is the body that sprang from such a seed,” just as we recognize the different kinds of corn or flowers that spring from the different kinds of seed that are sown. Take away recognition, and you have taken away, I think, one of the joys of heaven. There seems to me a great deal of heaven’s sweetness in the little verse (to quote another of the children’s hymns)—

*“Teachers, too, shall meet above,
And our pastors whom we love
Shall meet to part no more.”*

III. And now, in the third place, we have A GENTLE EXHORTATION.

The exhortation here is delicately hinted at—that the sorrow of bereaved Christians for their Christian friends ought not to be at all like the sorrow of unconverted persons for their ungodly relatives. We are not forbidden to sorrow, “Jesus wept.” The Gospel does not teach us to be stoics, we ought to weep, for it was intended that the rod should be felt, otherwise we could not “hear the rod, and who hath appointed it.”

If we did not feel the stroke when our friends were taken away, we would prove ourselves worse than heathen men and publicans. God’s grace does not take away our sensibilities, it only refines them, and in some degree restrains the violence of their expression. Still, there ought to be some difference between the sorrow of the righteous and the sorrow of the wicked.

First, *there should be a difference in its vehemence.* It may be natural to the unbridled passions of an ungodly man, who has lost his wife, to tear his hair, to throw himself upon the bed, to clutch the body, to declare it shall not be buried, to rave through the house cursing God, and saying all manner of hard things of His dispensations, but that would not do for a Christian. He must not murmur. A Christian may stand and weep, he may kiss the dear, cold hand for the last time, and rain showers of tears on the lifeless body, while “pity swells the tide of love.”

But God and His religion demand that he should say, after doing this, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” He may weep—he ought to, he may sorrow—he ought to, he may wear the habiliments of mourning—God forbid that we should ever believe in any religion which should proscribe our showing some outward signs of sorrow for our friends!—yet we may not, and we must not, weep as others weep, we must not always carry the red and tearful eye, we must not always take with us the face that is downcast and distressed, if we do, the world will say of us that our conduct belies our profession, and our feelings are at variance with our faith.

Again, there is another thing we must never allow to enter into our grief—*the least degree of repining.* A wicked man, when he sorrows for those who are gone without hope, not infrequently murmurs against God, but it is far otherwise with the Christian, he meekly bows his head, and says, “Thy will, O God, be done.”

The Christian must still acknowledge the same gracious hand of God, whether it is stretched forth to give or to take away. The language of his faith is, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; though he should take all away, yet will I not repine.” I do not say that all Christians are able to maintain such a

cheerful submission of spirit. I only say that they ought, and that such is the tendency of the Christian religion, and if they had more of the Spirit of God within their hearts, that would be their habitual disposition.

We may sorrow, beloved, but not with repining. There must be resignation mixed with the regret. There must be the yielding up, even with grateful acquiescence, that which God asks for, seeing we believe that He does but take what is His own.

And now, there is just one further observation. I believe that, *when the Christian sorrows, he ought to be as glad as he is sorrowful*. Put your sadness in one scale, and your gladness in the other scale, then see if the reasons for praise be not as weighty as the reasons for grief. Then you will say, “She is gone, there is a tear for her. She is in heaven, there is a smile for her. Her body is with the worms, weep, eyes. Her soul is with Jesus, shout, you lips, ay, shout for joy. The cold sod has covered her, she is gone from my sight, she sleeps in the sad, sad grave, bring me the habiliments of mourning.

No, she is before the throne of God and the Lamb, blessed for aye, lend me a harp, and let me thank my God she has joined the white-robed host on yonder blessed plains. O hearse and funeral, O shroud and garments of woe, you are most fitting for her! I have lost her and she herself, with many a pang and struggle, has passed through the valley of the shadow of death, but O joyous face! O songs of gladness! O shouts of rapture! You are equally becoming! for when she passed through the valley of the shadow of death, she feared no evil, for Thy rod and Thy staff did comfort her. Now, beyond the reach of death’s alarms, she does bathe her soul in seas of bliss, she is with her Lord.”

It is well to have a little singing as well as weeping at a funeral, it well becomes the burial of the saints. Angels never weep when saints die, they sing. You never heard a saint say, when he was dying, “There are angels in the room, hark! you can hear them sobbing because I am dying.” No, but we have often heard a saint say, “There are angels in the room, and I can hear them singing.” That is because angels are wiser than we are. We judge by the sight of our eyes, and the hearing of our ears, but angels judge after another fashion. They “see and hear and know” the joys of the blessed, and therefore they have no tears, but they have songs for them, and they sing loudly when the Christian is carried home, like a shock of corn fully ripe.

And now, beloved, we shall soon all of us die. In a few more years, I shall have a gravestone above my grave. Some of you, I hope, will say, “There lies our minister, who once gathered us together in the house of God, and led us to the mercy seat, and joined in our song. There lies one who was often despised and rejected of men, but whom God did nevertheless bless to the salvation of our souls, and sealed His testimony in our hearts and consciences by the operation of the Holy Ghost.” Perhaps some of you will visit my tomb, and will bring a few flowers to scatter on it, in glad and grateful remembrance of the happy hours we spent together. It is quite as probable that your tombs will be built as soon as mine.

Ah, dear friends! Should we have to write on your tombstones, “She sleeps in Jesus”? “He rests in the bosom of his Master,” or will we have to speak the honest truth, “He has gone to his own place”? Which shall it be? Ask yourselves, each one of you, where will your soul be? Shall it mount up there—

*“Where our best friends, our kindred, dwell,
Where God our Savior reigns,”—*

or—

*“Shall devils plunge you down to hell,
In infinite despair?”*

You can ascertain which it will be, you can tell it by this, Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you stand on Christ, the solid rock? Have you built your hope of heaven alone on Him? Have you, as a guilty sinner, cast yourself at His mercy seat, looking to His blood and righteousness, to be saved by them, and by them alone? If so, fear not to die, you shall be safe, whene’er

the summons comes to you. But if not, tremble, tremble! you may die tomorrow—you must die one day, it will be a sad thing so to die as to be lost beyond recovery. May God Almighty grant that we may be all saved at last, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.