

Things Unfinished

Several years ago a young man asked his father a question about a moment similar to the one we are a part of today. The young man asked, "Father, why is there so much sadness at funerals?" The father patiently considered this question and then offered the following answer: "Son," he said, "funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED."

There is a profound quality about this loving fathers words. For indeed to a great extent funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED. They're about words we never got around to saying. They're about a call never returned, a letter never answered, an apology never given or forgiveness never extended. They're about sounds we cannot hear, a touch we cannot feel, and a taste we cannot savor. Funerals are about a canvass that will no longer feel the gentile stroke of an artist's brush, or, a child the caress of a parent. Funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED.

To most there is a great sadness about funerals because death seems so complete.....so final. The loss seems so permanent. The Bible calls death the great enemy. It robs man of the opportunity to create, to share, to hope and even to love. When speaking of the dead the Psalmist wrote "His breath goes forth, he returns to the earth, and in that day his thoughts perish." The great king of Israel, Solomon said "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything neither have they any more reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." When describing the power of death the Bible says, "His sons come to honor him but he knows it not." But still they come. Some to mourn. Some to honor. And some to reconcile. To do in death what seemed too great to do in life. Funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED.

To be sure death is very real and imminent. The Bible says, "It is appointed unto all men once to die." No matter how great or small, death is inevitable. The book of Ecclesiastes says, "For that which befalls the sons of men, befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea they have all one breath; so that man has no preeminence above a beast. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." James, the brother of Jesus wrote, "for what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." When contemplating his own mortality, King David said:

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee... (Psa. 39:4-5)

Today many are convinced that the saved don't really die - that they are in heaven enjoying a better life. But this is not true. Jesus himself said "No man has ascended into heaven but He that came down from heaven..." Even the great champions of the Bible eventually died and have returned to the earth. When speaking of King David, the apostle Peter said, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this very day." Peter then went on to say, "David is not ascended into the heavens." In the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews great heroes of faith such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, and Moses are identified as dead. When speaking of these men the author says, "These all died having not received the promise." Funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED.

But is there more to this day? Why is it that some can see GREAT HOPE in such a moment? The Bible says that the day of our death is greater than the day of our birth. Why? The scriptures declare that “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” What could these words possibly mean?

Dear friends, the answer to these questions rest securely in the hands of a great architect -- a being so powerful that the Bible says “the heavens were fashioned by His wisdom.” When describing this great architect the scriptures say: “He spoke and earth existed.” The God of the Bible is so great that He not only has power over the universe, He actually has power over its very destiny. The ancient prophet Isaiah recorded the words of this great architect. Consider for a moment what the God of the Bible says through him:

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.(Isa.46:9-10)

Just what is Gods pleasure? Is it possible to know it? And what does He say about THINGS UNFINISHED?

Some 4000 years ago during the days of the patriarchs a man whom God called “perfect” advanced a question that has been pondered by the great thinkers and philosophers down through the ages. A question that is appropriate to consider on this day. The man’s name was Job and the question is recorded in the 14th chapter of a book that bears his name. Job asked, “If a man dies shall he live again?” This question although simple in form cuts through all the complexities in life. It has been the source of wonder to mankind for millennia. In short it is asking: Is there something beyond what we can see in this existence? And how can we know it is real? To discover the answer to these questions, we must first understand who God is.

The Bible reveals that the great God of Heaven is a God of life. He is the master architect of all things living. And He has promised that the time is coming when one day life will fill the entire universe and even the memory of death will evaporate.

The Bible speaks of a life after this mortal existence. It speaks of an incorruptible kingdom that can only be entered into by those who are also incorruptible. Jesus spoke of this kingdom at the very beginning of his ministry. He was in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover and was approached by a leader of the Jews named Nicodemus. This meeting and its profound lesson is described by the apostle John in his gospel. John writes:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus then contrasted a fleshly existence with a spiritual existence.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. (Jn. 3:1-8)

With these words Jesus was declaring that the Great God of Heaven has envisioned a kingdom that was never designed to be inhabited by the physical realm.

The apostle Paul understood this truth and wrote about it to the church at Corinth. Notice his words:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (I Cor. 15:50)

Here, Paul states with great clarity that the corruptible world of which we are a part is not compatible with an incorruptible world to which we are destined. And in the very next verse Paul explains how Gods children will enter into this incorruptible Kingdom.

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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.(I Cor.15:51-57)

The Bible speaks prolifically concerning the power of death. But it also speaks of a great victory over it. That victory is the promise of a resurrection. Jesus believed in that promise. And He knew that he would be the architect of that victory. When speaking to the religious leaders of His day Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God..... For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice... (Jn. 5:25-28)

Jesus had power over the grave and His own life demonstrated that fact. During the final weeks of his life Jesus was summoned to Bethany to the home of his dear friend Lazarus who had died just a few days before. When comforting Lazarus' sister Martha, Jesus said "Thy brother shall live again." Martha responded "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus then offered words of extraordinary consolation and hope. Jesus told Martha and he tells you "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Here the Savior of the world declares that He has power over death itself. Earlier when describing His own impending death Jesus said "I lay my life down and I take it up again." His resurrection stands as incontrovertible evidence of Gods power over the grave. Jesus resurrection is a source of great consolation and hope to all of Gods children. The apostle Paul wrote of that hope in a letter to a church in Thessalonica.

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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the words of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes. 4:13-18)

The promise of a resurrection is real. Fashioned by a real God. Proclaimed by real servants. And made possible by a real Savior. The time is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice. He shall call and they shall answer. But there is even more to this great story:

Dear friends, the Bible reveals that Gods great love and authority over his creation is even considerate of those who do not know him. Think of the billions who never heard of the God of the Bible. Or the billions who never understood when they did hear. Most religions consign such people to a horrible fate. But the God of hope has a promise for them. They too shall live again. In the 20th chapter of the book of Revelation the apostle John describes the destiny of the true believer. But he also offers words of consolation to those who do not know God. Notice what John writes:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. (Rev 20:4-5)

The scriptures declare that at the time of this second resurrection, the billions of people who never truly knew about God and His plan will be given an opportunity to know Him and his great law. It is then that they will understand His hope and be given an opportunity to be a part of His incorruptible Kingdom and to choose life.

Today we live in a corruptible world. A world filled with suffering and death. A world of THINGS UNFINISHED. But Gods word exhorts His children to take heart. For the day is coming when death will be no more and life will fill the entire universe. When writing to the church at Corinth the apostle Paul said "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Imagine a kingdom where there is no death. A kingdom where life is everywhere. The Bible says that even nature itself will be incorruptible. Comfort yourselves with these words:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves

also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.(Ro. 8:18-23)

What will it be like when this change comes? What will it be like when God's children become incorruptible? It will be a time that will behold the crowning achievement of the master architect. The fulfillment of a creation that is as magnificent as its creator. It reflects who God is and what we shall be. When describing the incredible potential God has given to His children the apostle John wrote:

Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn. 3:1-2)

The apostle Peter described a time when we will be partakers of the divine nature. The very nature of God Himself. Infinite in love. Infinite in wisdom. Infinite in mercy. Infinite in hope. We shall be just like Him. It is hard to imagine such a destiny because we are so weak, so flawed, so blemished, so corruptible, so finite. What right do we have to the infinite?

Dear friends, the infinite is a gift, given by an infinite God who loved man so much that he gave His son in order that man might enter into life. That entrance is through a resurrection. A point at which God's children will move from corruption to incorruption. From weakness to power. From dishonor to glory. When writing of this moment, King David said:

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I will be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness. (Psa.17:15)

The promise of a resurrection is indelibly etched throughout the pages of the Bible. That promise reflects God's great wisdom and love. It also reflects His hope and desire for all mankind. A desire that will see mankind as citizens in an infinite kingdom. A kingdom of infinite possibilities. Of music yet to be heard. Of colors yet to be discovered. Of dreams yet to be imagined. It is a kingdom of life where death has no power. And it is God's good pleasure to give that kingdom.

At the very end of the Bible, the great Creator and Sustainer of the universe provides a glimpse into His incorruptible Kingdom. This picture was given in a vision to the apostle John over 1900 years ago. In this vision, John saw a great city standing in the midst of a universe where everything was new. Consider the majesty of what John saw and the great hope that is reflected in this vision.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. 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. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. (Rev. 21:1-5)

The young man's father said "Funerals are about THINGS UNFINISHED." THINGS UNFINISHED. God does not believe in THINGS UNFINISHED. His power over death and the grave will graphically demonstrate that fact. And His kingdom will stand as an eternal truth that He will finish what He has begun. He will accomplish His good pleasure. He has given us His immutable promise.

4000 thousand years ago a man named Job asked "If a man dies shall he live again?" Job then provided the answer to this timeless question.

All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. (Job 14:14 -15)

All who have died rest in the hope of that moment when He shall call and they shall answer. Today they are in the earth from which they came. But their spirit and their hope is placed in the hands of a Great Architect. They are in very good hands.