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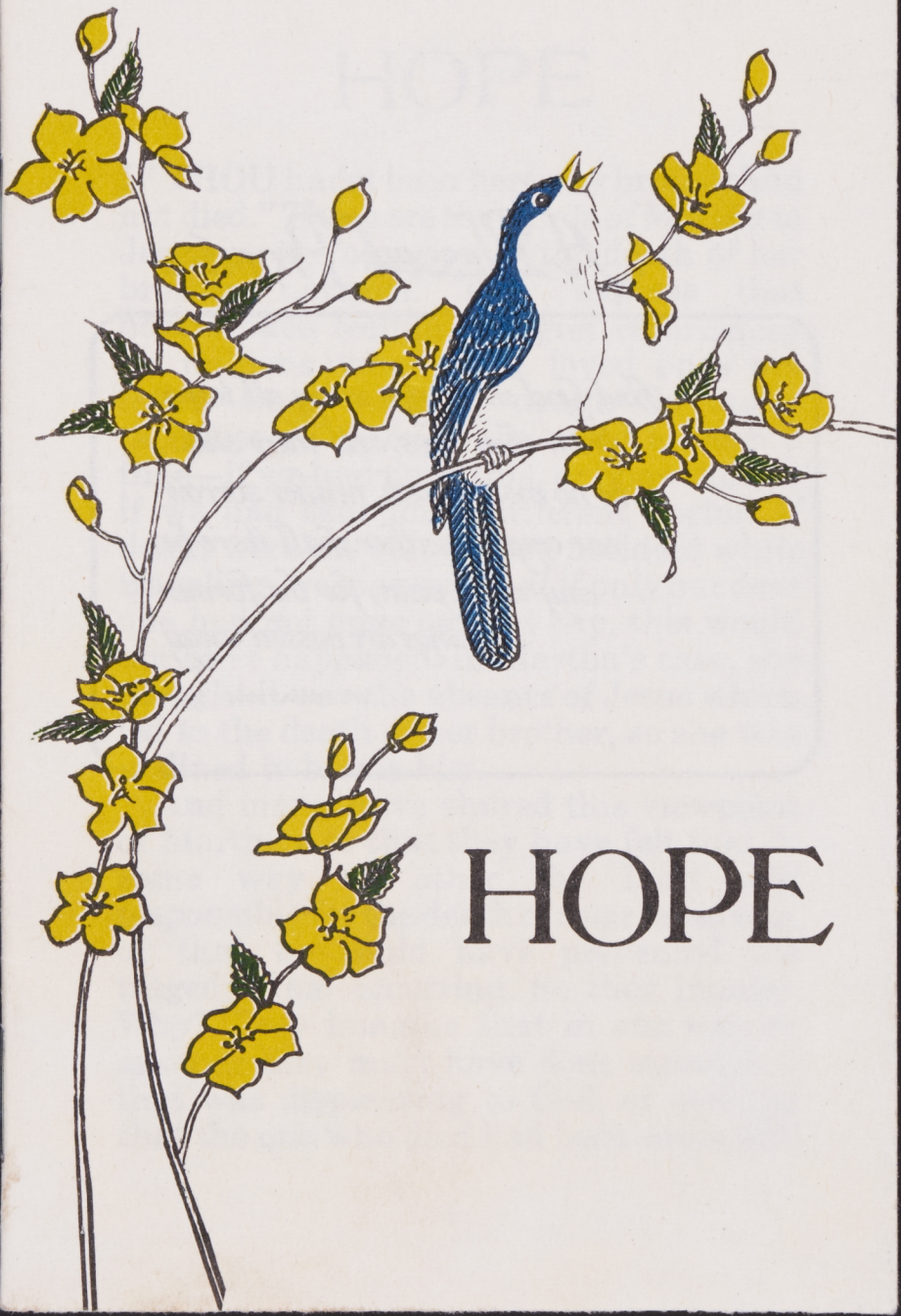
Wherever I am, whatever I do...



...my thoughts keep drifting back to you.

just Because you
are such a very very
beautiful Lady - Whom
I love very much. May
the Lord Keep you in his
perfect care.

Friend Shedrick —



HOPE

A Blessed Promise

"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."

REVELATION 21:4

HOPE

IF THOU hadst been here, my brother had not died." These are the words of Martha to Jesus on the occasion of the death of her brother Lazarus. They express that heartbroken feeling of regret experienced by millions when their loved ones are taken from them in death. So many thoughts go through the mind at such a time—if we had done this, or done that; or if we had sent for a different doctor. If death were the result of an accident while traveling, we may say that if only our dear one had not gone on that trip, this would not have happened. In Martha's case, she thought it was the absence of Jesus which led to the death of her brother, so she was inclined to blame him.

And many have shared this viewpoint of Martha's in that they have felt that in some way or other the Lord was responsible for the death of their loved one, or that he could have prevented the tragedy from occurring. So they inquire, Why? They imagine that in one way or another they must have done something that was displeasing to God, or perhaps that the one who died had been especially

punished for wrongdoing. And then perhaps with a shudder they think, If this latter be true, what is the condition of the deceased one now? Is he suffering that which is worse than death?

Mingled with the thoughts which plague so many when death visits the home is the usually unanswered question of what lies beyond the grave. Will we ever see our loved ones again? Are they happy now, and shall we one day join them in their happiness? Our hearts yearn for definite answers to all these perplexing questions which arise out of our sorrow. And these questions can be answered, for the answers are to be found in the Word of God.

Why do people die, anyway? Many would be inclined to answer that it is natural for people to grow old and die; but the weakness of that answer is that millions die before they grow old. The grim reaper Death is no respecter of persons, for he strikes down young and old alike, also the saint and the sinner. But whether it is an infant or an aged parent who passes away, the shock is equally great. We are never prepared for death, and even after thousands of years of experience with this monster, the human race has not become used to his visits—they always come as an

unwelcome surprise. Actually, then, there is no such thing as dying a "natural death," for death is always unnatural, and unwanted.

The Bible explains that human beings die because of sin—not the individual sin of each one who is struck down by death, but original sin, the sin of our first parents. Through them, the apostle explains, "sin entered into the world, and death by sin." (Rom. 5:12) By heredity we are all members of a dying race. It is well to remember this when death comes into our homes, for it helps us to realize that this tragic experience is not due to our lack of interest or care, and that it is not a special punishment, either upon the one who has died, or upon the relatives who remain. Our beloved ones die because "in Adam all die." And besides, we can take comfort in the wonderful promise of God's Word that just as all in Adam die, "so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Corinthians 15:22

Peacefully Sleeping

Going back to the days of Jesus and to that beloved family in Bethany—Mary, Martha and Lazarus—we are able to glean some very enlightening and encouraging thoughts. It appears that Jesus was a special friend of this family, and they took

it for granted when Lazarus became ill that Jesus would come to their aid as soon as he learned about it. Jesus' work had taken him some distance from Bethany at the time, but the two sisters sent a message to him which stated, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."—John 11:3

Jesus received this message but did nothing about it for two days. Finally he said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11) This announcement came as a surprise to his disciples. They too had heard that Lazarus was seriously sick. Probably Jesus had told them about the message he had received. But if now he was sleeping they could not understand why the Master would want to awaken him. They may have thought that this was mistaken judgment on his part, so they said to him, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." In other words, they thought it would be a great mistake to awaken a sick man who was resting quietly in sleep—that it would be much better for him to continue to sleep.

But they did not understand what Jesus meant. "Howbeit Jesus spoke of his death," the account tells us. (John 11:13) Seeing that his disciples misunderstood his reference to Lazarus being asleep, he said

unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." (John 11:14) Here we have from the Master's own lips a most interesting, and at the same time, comforting viewpoint of death. It is like a sleep, meaning that those who are dead are at rest, waiting, although unknowingly, for the Lord's time to come to awaken them from sleep—the sleep of death. Sleep is thus found to be one of the scriptural illustrations to help us grasp the meaning of death.

There are two main characteristics of sleep. One is that those who are asleep are unconscious. They are unaware of what is going on in the world around them. They are neither sorrowful nor happy. They have no worries, and experience no thrills of joy. They neither hunger nor thirst. Concerning them the Scriptures declare, "The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything."—Ecclesiastes 9:5.

But there is another characteristic of sleep which is also very significant when we are thinking of it as an illustration of death. It is the expectancy of an awakening. The mother tucks her darling child into its crib for the night, sings to it a soothing lullaby until its eyes close in sleep and its little brain enters the land of forgetfulness. The child is now

unconscious, and the mother tiptoes quietly out of the room, happy in her love for her darling, and rejoicing in her expectancy of hearing the delightsome prattle of her child the next morning. There are no tears, no aching heart, no lonesomeness; for the child is merely sleeping, and in the morning it will be awake with its brightness again permeating the home.

Concerning a young girl who had died, Jesus said, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth." (Matt. 9:24) Here again, as in the case of Lazarus, Jesus referred to death as being merely a sleep—a sleep, because from the standpoint of God's provision of life through Christ, there is to be an awakening in the morning of earth's new day, the day of Christ's reign soon to dawn. Jesus said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11) Jesus intended to awaken Lazarus from the sleep of death, and he carried out his intention later, much to the joy of Lazarus' sisters and to all who loved him.

To Live Again

After announcing his intentions to his disciples, Jesus journeyed to Bethany, to the home of his friends, Martha and Mary

Martha met him as he approached their home and gently chided him for not coming while her brother was still living. Then Jesus made a remarkable statement to her—words which have come echoing down through the centuries since, giving comfort to thousands of mourners who have been able to grasp their wonderful simplicity and to believe that one day they will come true. He said, "Thy brother shall rise again."—John 11:23

Here is the great hope of the Bible for all who have died—they shall live again. But we should not overlook that word "again." Jesus did not say to Martha, Weep not, for your brother is not really dead. He was dead! Jesus had said plainly to his disciples, "Lazarus is dead," and we can be sure that he would not contradict this truth in his conversation with Martha; so his message of comfort to her was that her brother should live again, that he who was dead would be restored to life.

Centuries before this, the Prophet Job inquired, "If a man die, shall he live again?"(Job 14:14) It is important to notice the correct manner in which Job asks this question. He does not inquire, "If a man die, is he really dead?" or, "Is there something about man that remains alive after the body dies?" Job knew that death

was a reality, a grimly tragic reality. He knew that death was a punishment for sin, and because the whole world of mankind were sinners, all were dying. What Job wanted to know was whether the dead would be restored to life—Shall he live "again"? Jesus answered this question for Job, for Martha, and for all who are willing to accept the simple truthfulness of his words, "Thy brother shall rise again."

That the dead should be restored to life at a future time was not a new idea to Martha, for she believed the Old Testament promises which hold out this blessed hope. The Prophet Job, after inquiring, "If a man die, shall he live again?" found the answer, and expressed it concerning his own hope, saying, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait (in death), 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

"The Last Day"

In a prophecy concerning the hope of the ultimate destiny of the children who were slain by the edict of Herod at the time Jesus was born, the Lord says to the weeping mothers, referred to in the prophecy as Rahel, "Refrain thy voice

from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded... and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border."—Jeremiah 31:16, 17

Martha probably knew of these wonderful promises assuring believers of a coming time when the dead, young and old, would be restored to life. Besides, Jesus had been a frequent visitor to their home, and she had doubtless heard the wonderful words of life as they came from his inspired lips. So when Jesus said to her, "Thy brother shall rise again," she replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:24) Yes, she knew that all the dead would "rise again"—that they would be awakened from the sleep of death—because she knew that this was the plan of God for all mankind.

What did Martha mean by the "last day"? The plan of God for the salvation and recovery of the human race from sin and death is divided into periods of time called in the Bible "days." It will be during the last of these periods of time, these days, that the divine recovery plan will reach its consummation. The "last day" in God's

plan is a thousand years in length—the thousand years of the reign of Christ.

The fact that this period is spoken of as a "day" is very significant, for it is in contrast with the six thousand years of human experience preceding it, which is referred to in the Scriptures as a time of darkness, a nighttime of sorrow and dying. Concerning this dark night of sin and suffering, and the morning of joy to follow, the psalmist wrote, "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Psalm 30:5

Although David speaks of the "anger" of God, we are not to think of him as being vindictive, or as taking delight in the suffering of his creatures. Neither will his anger be expressed in the torment of the wicked in a fiery hell forever; nor in a "purgatory" for a limited period of time. The New Testament tells us of the "wrath" of God, and explains that even now it is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:18) God's wrath is revealed in the death sentence which is being enforced upon the entire human race—"As in Adam all die."—I Corinthians 15:22

In God's favor is life, declares the psalmist. (Psalm 30:5) Here God's favor is

contrasted with his anger. When our first parents transgressed God's law he withdrew his favor from them. Without his favor they could not continue to live, so automatically the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" began to be operative—they began to die.—Gen. 3:19

And the human race has continued to die ever since. When God withdrew the sunshine of his favor a "darkness" settled down over the human race, a darkness so dense that it has been felt in all the aches and pains incidental to the dying process. This "night" of the world's experience with sin and its result has indeed been one of weeping. But it is not to last forever! It has been a long and dreary night, but the morning is coming, and with the coming of morning will also come the promised joy—a joy which will be unbounded when death ceases to strike down its victims, and those who have died will, by divine power, be made alive again.

And so it was that when Jesus said to Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again," her mind naturally conjured up this wonderful picture of joy that will come to all mankind in that new day when blessings of life will be showered down upon all, hence her reply, "I know that he

shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus did not deny the truthfulness of what Martha said. Indeed, it was doubtless because of his own ministry in that home in Bethany that this hope of a general awakening of all who sleep in death was so bright in Martha's heart. Rather, Jesus confirmed her faith, saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."—John 11:25, 26

"I am the resurrection, and the life," the Master said, meaning that in that future day when the dead would be made alive, and Eden would bloom again, with its borders encompassing the whole earth, he would be the channel of divine power through which it would be accomplished. Jesus is the great Light-giver of the world—the light of life. (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5) His kingdom reign will bring in the "day" of health and life. He will be what the prophet describes as the "Sun of Righteousness," who will arise with "healing in his wings."—Malachi 4:2

The Christ

"Believeth thou this?" Jesus inquired of Martha—Do you believe that I am the One

who will restore your brother to life in that day when God's loving purpose toward mankind will be consummated? And Martha replied, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (John 11:26, 27) From the time man fell into sin and death God had been promising to send a Deliverer. The promise was made to Abraham that his "seed" was to "bless all the families of the earth." (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18) The Apostle Paul explains that Jesus is that "seed" of promise. (Gal. 3:16) And Martha knew this, too, and because the promised Christ was to bless all the families of the earth she knew that he also would have to be the "resurrection, and the life."

Even in Martha's day there had been more than four thousand years of dying. Her own brother had died, so she knew that if God's promises to bless all mankind through Christ were to be fulfilled, those asleep in death would need to be awakened; and she believed that Jesus was the One who would do it—"In the resurrection at the last day."

"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," said Jesus. (John 11:25) Here is a definite promise to

all believers of an awakening from the sleep of death. It was intended primarily to assure Martha that the death of Lazarus was not due to his lack of faith or loyalty to Jesus. Lazarus believed in Jesus, yet he died. This has been true of all believers from that time until now. But Jesus was assuring Martha and us that death is not the end—"Though he were dead," or has died, "yet shall he live," that is, he shall be restored to life.

And then, Jesus draws the curtain of uncertainty aside and gives a further glimpse into that "last day" in order that we might appreciate still more the boundless love of God in his provision of life for all mankind. He says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." This statement is not true of the present time, because all now die. The future life of all mankind depends upon their being awakened from the sleep of death. But it will be different in that new day—that day in which the "Sun of Righteousness" dispels the darkness of the long night of sin and death, and brings light and life to all mankind. Those living then, and who believe on Christ, shall never die—they shall actually remain alive forever as human beings.

The Just and the Unjust

Who will be alive in that "last day," that thousand-year day when blessings of everlasting life will be assured to all who then believe? All mankind will then be living, for the plan of God is to awaken all from the sleep of death. Paul says that "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15) And Jesus declared, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." (John 5:28, 29) The comforting thought of the remainder of this passage of Scripture has been destroyed by a mistranslation. Properly translated it reads, "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."—John 5:29, Revised Version

"They that have done good," says the Master, shall come forth to the "resurrection of life." This is a reference to the reward of consecrated believers who have proved their worthiness of "glory and honor and immortality." (Romans 2:7) These are to live and reign with Christ, as a part of the "seed" of Abraham through which all the families of the earth are to blessed. (Gal. 3:27-29) These will be like

Jesus and will share his heavenly glory. (I John 3:2) Theirs will be a "crown of life," even the "divine nature."—Revelation 2:10; II Peter 1:4

But those who come forth in the resurrection to live and reign with Christ will be a very small number in comparison with the millions who have died. Jesus refers to them as a "little flock" to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom. (Luke 12:32) The vast majority of the dead are of that class which have not done good from the divine standpoint. They die as members of a sinful, dying race. According to human standards, most of them have been morally upright people — good citizens, and good neighbors — but they have not been footstep followers of the Master; hence the blood of Christ has not given them a standing of righteousness before God.

Nevertheless, God loves these also, and he sent his Son to die for them that they might have an opportunity to live forever. Everlasting life through Jesus is obtainable only upon the basis of belief, and the vast majority of the human race have never had a genuine opportunity to believe. Millions have never heard of Jesus, and among those who have heard of him there are few who have understood clearly the real purpose of his coming into

the world. There have been so many conflicting theories concerning Christ and Christianity that most honest people are confused, and because of this have never taken Christianity seriously. They have not been intentionally wicked, but they have not done "good" in the sense of becoming footstep followers of Jesus.

These millions are also to be awakened from the sleep of death. Paul speaks of this awakening as being "saved," and it is God's will, he explains, that they shall "be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (I Timothy 2:4-6) The great truth which will then be made known to all—clearly and unmistakably—is that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all"—that is, that he died for "the sins of the whole world," and that those who accept this provision may live.—I John 2:2

It was this that Jesus meant when he said to Martha, "Whosoever liveth"—that is, who has been awakened from the sleep of death "in the resurrection at the last day"—and believeth in me shall never die." (John 11:26) That will be the trial period for the world, the time when they will be faced with the great decision which will mean life or death for eternity. (Acts 17:31) When Jesus promised that they would come forth from death, he said they would come forth to what he described by

the Greek word *krisis* (English, "crisis"), that is, a testing time, when, if they turn to God, to Jesus, and to righteousness, they will not need to die again, but in thus believing will "live forever."—John 6:51

"Believest Thou This?"

When Jesus explained this wonderful hope of future life to Martha he inquired of her, "Believest thou this?" This is a heart-searching question for all of us today. If we can exercise a genuine faith in the promises of God, much of the bitterness and sorrow will be removed from our hearts when our loved ones are taken from us in death. If we can believe, we will know that they have not gone forever, that there is to be a glorious homecoming of the dead, an awakening from the sleep of death. Jesus said to his disciples concerning Lazarus, "I go that I may awake him out of sleep," and Jesus comes again at his second advent to awaken from the sleep of death all those for whom he died. It was his sacrifice that changed death from an eternal oblivion to a tranquil sleep from which there will be an awakening.

How Literal Will It Be?

There has been so much misunderstanding concerning the hope of the resurrection that many find it difficult to

grasp the reality of what it will mean for the people. But there should be no vagueness concerning it, for Jesus gave illustrations of the very literal manner in which the promises of God are to be fulfilled. We have one of these illustrations in the case of Lazarus. After the Master had explained to Martha the great truth of the general resurrection, and made it plain that in the "last day" those who were awakened and believed on him would never die, he went to the tomb of her brother, and through the use of divine power, called him forth from death.

Jesus spoke to Lazarus, saying, "Come forth," and the account tells us that "he that was dead came forth." (John 11:43, 44) Jesus then gave instructions to remove the grave clothes from him so that he might be free again to mingle with his family and friends. He was back with them, the same Lazarus as before he died. He was not a phantom, nor a ghost. He didn't need to tip tables or rattle mirrors in order to let his friends know he was in their midst, because he had been returned to them, personally and bodily. Just as Lazarus had been dead, so now he was alive, and his sisters and friends rejoiced.

In this we have a practical and understandable illustration of what it will

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