

# Matters of Life and Death



One Saturday morning I received an urgent call from a friend of mine, who told me her dog was very ill. As she didn't have a car of her own, she asked me to help her take her dog to the vet.

The dog was lying on the floor on an old sheet and was unable to move his legs because they had stopped working – this was serious. With the help of another neighbour, we managed to carry him to the car and laid him down in the back. Then, with the sick dog settled in the back, my friend and I drove to the vets. When we arrived, the vet and a veterinary nurse lifted him out of the car and took him into the surgery.

The vet told us he didn't know what was the matter, but the dog was obviously very sick. It would cost a lot of money to investigate, which my friend could not afford, and the vet felt there was little likelihood of a recovery. The only other option was to 'put the dog to sleep'.

After a brief discussion, my friend decided on the second option, although it was a painfully sad one. She was upset, and I was too because I'd known the dog since he was a

puppy. The vet gave him the lethal injection; he went from a creature that was obviously alive to a lifeless corpse. He lay there with his eyes open, a solid unyielding body that had once been a much-loved pet; but now the life had gone from him, he was transformed into a lifeless, dog-shaped lump.

## Life – and Death

Sad as it was, the experience set me thinking about death and the miracle of life. God the Creator gave life in the beginning – life is very precious; He made life upon earth for a reason. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that God spoke and created plants and trees, fish and birds and then the land creatures.

*Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so (Genesis 1:24).*

Finally, God created Adam and Eve who were to be the pinnacle of His creation. They were commanded:

*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:16–17).*

They disobeyed God and ate of the fruit – this was the first sin, and as a consequence, they would eventually die. Not just them though; because of Adam's sin, death was introduced to

all creation. The Bible is clear about what death means for us:

*For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20).*

*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten (9:5).*

*Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:4–5).*

*Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish (Psalm 146:3–4).*

## **A Way Back**

However, God did not want this situation to remain – He has a plan which will ultimately result in the Garden of Eden being restored upon earth and the earth being populated by immortal, obedient believers. This will be in the Kingdom of God.

It was in speaking to the serpent in the story, that God showed there is a way for mankind to come back to Him.

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).*



From that time on, the serpent came to symbolise sin. It was part of God's plan from the very beginning that He was, at some time in the future, going to send someone who would save people from sin, specifically those who showed faith in God. The promised Saviour was to deal a death-blow to sin (bruise the head of the serpent) but it would hurt him temporarily (bruise his heel) in the process.

The Lord Jesus Christ is that person, described in the New Testament as the 'last Adam'. His work is explained by Paul:

*For if by the one man's offence, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:17–19).*

## **Eternal Life**

When Life is mentioned in the Bible and particularly in the New Testament,

it usually means eternal life. Jesus said:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16–17).*

It is a comforting fact that God does not want anyone to perish. However, if we refuse to listen to His word and His Son, we effectively bring condemnation on ourselves. By ignoring His appeal, we leave ourselves subject to sin and permanent death. It was the same in the time of Jesus.

*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (v19–21).*



Jesus came into the world to grant life to any who sincerely believe in him and come to God through him. This is the hope we can share.

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth, he will raise the dead and judge them. He will decide who has genuinely tried to do the will of God, and should be granted eternal life.

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son... For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:21–22, 26–29).*

We should be excited at the prospect of being found worthy to enter the kingdom of God, and should make the effort now to respond to Him, to be baptised and to do our best to please Him.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory... Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:31, 34).*

**Grahame A. Cooper**