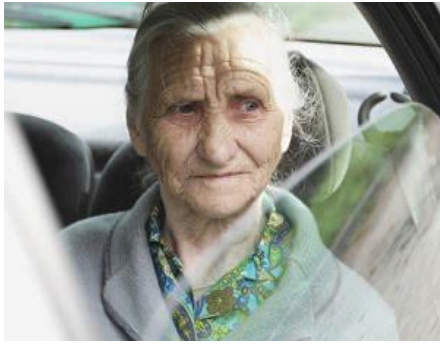


Preparing for the Funeral

By Jim Elliff



My aged aunt suffered from a series of small strokes impairing her former elephantine memory. We cherish the story of the time she attended the funeral of her uncle William. On the way back the car passed the home of the deceased uncle. Her contemplative voice was heard from the back seat, almost talking to herself. “Hmm,” she mused, “I don’t remember seeing uncle William there today. Wonder where he was?”

The truth is that uncle William had prepared for his funeral ahead of time and skipped town. Seriously. He vacated to heaven! My aunt, as bewildered as she sometimes tended to be, was quite right!

It might be thought that the way to prepare for a good funeral is to have a well-lived life. This is partially true. But the fuller answer is this: To prepare for your funeral you must never die at all. OK, I’m playing with words. But I’m not the only one who has done that.

Lazarus Has Died

Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived two miles outside of Jerusalem in Bethany. This home was open to Jesus whenever he and his disciples needed it. The hospitality was the best, and Jesus counted on these three unmarried followers as the closest of friends.

Then Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill. Contrary to what you would expect, He remained where he was for two more days before going to Bethany. Upon leaving He told his disciples, “Lazarus is dead; and for your sakes I am glad I am not there, in order that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

By the time He arrived, Lazarus had been in the grave four days. When Jesus approached the home, Martha ran out to meet Jesus and the disciples. “Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, He will give it.”

Now, step into this verbal exchange and listen careful to what Jesus says.

Jesus: “Your brother shall rise again.”

Martha: “I know that he will rise again at the resurrection, on the last day.”

Jesus: “I *am* the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he has died, shall live; and every one who is living and is a believer in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

The story concludes by Jesus actually raising Lazarus from the dead, the most notable of the miracles of the three-year period of Jesus’ ministry outside of His own resurrection. I’m confident that Lazarus did not want to come back, but returning would have its purpose.

It is in these enigmatic words of Jesus that we learn how to prepare for our funeral—that is, to prepare to be away when many people will think we’re in the long box. And, not only to be absent, but to be in the right place—not hell.

Two Assertions

Jesus made two assertions after stating that He is the resurrection and the life: 1. He who believes in me, even if he has died, shall live, and 2. Every one who is living and is a believer in me shall never die.

Obviously Jesus is speaking of two ways of living and two ways of dying. There is physical death and spiritual death; and there is physical living and then spiritual living. It is possible for a person to die and yet never die and to live only temporarily and yet live forever. In fact, it is possible for a person to be alive, yet be dead, then be made alive, then die, yet live forever after he dies. Confused yet?

The Bible teaches that we are “dead in our trespasses and sins.” Though we are living physically, we are dead spiritually unless something happens. But if we come to believe in Christ, we are alive. This means that even though *physical* death will come eventually, we will live forever—skipping that dreaded funeral while in heaven.

So how do you prepare for the funeral you most want to miss? You believe in Christ. To *believe* means that you reject confidence in yourself as your hope of being accepted by God. Then you place your trust entirely in Christ alone and what he has done on the cross as your passport to forgiveness and eternal life. Not everybody does that. In fact, only a few make the essential preparations in time.

Will they be saying at your funeral: “Hmm, I don’t believe I saw _____ there today?”

And perhaps more to the point, will they wonder where you are?