

HE MUST RISE

Noah Webster defined ‘grief’ as ‘The pain of mind produced by loss, misfortune, injury or evils of any kind.’ Elizabeth Kübler was an expert on grief, and she proposed that, when one learns that he has a terminal illness, his grief has five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. First, he doubts the diagnosis, believing the medical expert must be mistaken; then he is angry about it, thinking it somehow unfair, or unjust; then he negotiates with some higher power, offering to reform his life in exchange for a longer one; then, knowing that he cannot extend the span of his life, he despairs; finally, he accepts that he will die sooner, rather than later, and may try to make the best of what remains. Kübler adapted her model to any personal loss, including the death of a loved one. Her work has been very influential. Kübler’s experience of her own mortality was somewhat a reverse of her five stages. Kübler was reared in a Christian home, but later fell away from the faith, and turned to spiritualism, for which her husband divorced her. She came to believe in reincarnation, and accepted death as a natural part of the cycle of life. Late in life, she suffered a number of strokes, and one side of her body became paralyzed. Concerning her life at that time, she said in an interview:

For 15 hours a day, I sit in this same chair, totally dependent on someone else coming in here to make me a cup of tea. It's neither living nor dying. It's stuck in the middle.... My only regret is that for 40 years I spoke of a good God who helps people, who knows what you need and how all you have to do is ask for it. Well, that's baloney. I want to tell the world that it's a bunch of bull. Don't believe a word of it.” (SFGATE, May 31, 1997)

She despaired, and contemplated suicide. She said, “When I've had enough of this, I'll do it myself. I don't give a hoot about the afterlife, reincarnation or anything. I'm finished, and I'm not coming back.” (SFGATE, May 31, 1997) When asked which of the five stages of grief she was in, she replied, “Anger.” She was angry with God, not because she was going to die, but because God was keeping her alive. She said, “I told God last night he's a damned procrastinator.” She was foolish to long for death. God was keeping her alive so that she might have opportunity to repent, but her heart was too hard. Two years later, she died. A pathetic end to someone who rejected God. She will not remain dead, however. One day in the future she will rise from the dead, and stand before God in judgment. Death is not natural, and no one should accept it as natural, or make peace with it. Death is unnatural, and it is an enemy to be destroyed. Jesus, the Son of God, has with His own death destroyed death.

God is the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, and the giver of life. When He made the first man, Adam, He formed his body from the dust of the ground, and then “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7) God gave man life, but his life was not only physical; it was also spiritual. God made man, not simply to live, but to have life with God, to have fellowship with God. But God would have to test Adam’s loyalty, to test his faith. To this end, God gave the man a command. He told him not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or he would die. (Genesis 3:17) So long as Adam obeyed God, he would live; if he disobeyed God, then he would die. God gave man life, and He could take it away. Life and death are God’s prerogative, and, if a man violates a command of God, then that man deserves to die. The wages of sin, Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, is death. (Romans 6:23)

The serpent, intent on destroying man, the image of God, led Adam’s wife, Eve, to eat to sin against God. She ate from the forbidden tree, and, in turn, led her husband to do the same. So, Adam violated God’s command concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and, because he did, God sentenced him to death.

God expelled Adam from the garden of Eden, and barred the entrance, so that Adam could no longer eat from the tree of life and live forever. Adam's sin resulted, not only in his own condemnation, but in the condemnation of the entire race. When Adam sinned, the human race sinned, and so every person comes into the world under the sentence of death. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5:12) The serpent, which is to say, the devil, with malice aforethought, brought about the death of mankind. The devil, Jesus said, "was a murderer from the beginning." (John 8:44) Yet, God did not leave mankind without hope. He would not leave mankind in his state of death. He would bring life to mankind. He said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) With this first gospel, this first good news, God promised to undo what the devil had done, to reverse the effects of man's fall into sin. Mankind was dead, but God would give mankind life. As a symbol of this promise, God killed an animal, and dressed the man and the woman in the animal's skin. God would redeem mankind, but He could not do so by fiat. His justice required that man be redeemed by the shedding of blood, that man be given life by way of death.

After the Exodus, at Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel in which he promised to be their God if they would obey His commands. They said they would obey, and so God gave them His law, and told them of the blessings they would receive for obedience, and the curses they would receive for disobedience. The Lord told them, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 18:5; compare Matthew 19:7, Galatians 3:12) Life with God depended upon obedience. Before Israel entered the promised land, Moses warned them of what would become of anyone who did not perfectly keep the law of God: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." (Deuteronomy 27:26; compare Galatians 3:12)

Of course, the Israelites, because they were, like all descendents of Adam, sinners, could not keep the law. Everyone broke the law at some point, and so everyone was guilty of breaking the whole of it. But God had graciously made provision for their sins: he included in the law a system of animal sacrifices to atone for the sins they were bound to commit. Yet, these sacrifices did not make real atonement, and had to be offered continually. God, as it were, overlooked their sins until He could make a real atonement for them. God through His prophets revealed that He would send into the world One who would atone for their sins. Of this One, Isaiah the prophet said:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (Isaiah 53:4–8)

A man's sin requires death. Men sin against God, and there needs to be a reckoning. Yet, God in His great mercy would not demand that every man pay for his own transgressions. God would be just to require every man's life for their sins. In His mercy, He substituted animals for men. Because these were not sufficient payments, God would send a man to die for men, so that men would not have to die. God would send to His

people a man who would pay the price for them. God would cause that One to suffer; God would strike Him down, and He would do so in order that He would not have to strike down His people. God would chastise Him, so that he might reconcile men to Himself, and they might have peace. This One would be a sacrificial lamb who would atone for the sins of the people.

This One would die, but God would not allow Him to remain dead; He would raise Him from the dead. This is taught in the Scriptures by types. The Lord revealed this Redeemer's resurrection, not only in direct statement, but also in certain types in Scripture. The Lord commanded Abraham to offer His son Isaac as a burnt offering so that Abraham might prove his devotion to the Lord. Saint Paul explained to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Hebrews 11:17–19)

Abraham trusted the Lord, and was completely devoted to Him. So, he was willing to offer his son as a sacrifice. Yet, as God had told Abraham that He would through Isaac fulfill His promise to Abraham of many offspring, Abraham reasoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead. So, Abraham raised his knife to kill his only begotten son, but the Lord stopped him before he struck. In Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead, and so, in a manner of speaking, he received his son back from the dead. Abraham, by sacrificing his son, demonstrated to God his love for Him. God would demonstrate His love for the world by sacrificing His only-begotten Son for their sins. There is this difference: the Son of God would really die, and God would really raise Him from the dead. There is yet another type. When Jonah by ship fled from the call of God, caused a great storm to seize the ship. Jonah told the sailors that, if they would save themselves, then they must sacrifice him by throwing him overboard. They did throw him overboard, and a great fish swallowed him, and after three days and three nights the fish vomited Jonah out onto land. The resurrection of the redeemer is taught in the Scriptures by type, but also by direct statement. Concerning Him, David wrote in the book of Psalms, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 22:10)

This Redeemer is, of course, none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Of Him, Saint John wrote, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8) He is the Son of God who came into the world to save mankind. He said to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Abraham sacrificed his only-begotten son, and God sacrificed His. God could have raised Abraham's son from the dead, and He would raise His own Son. Jesus on more than one occasion told His disciples "how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matthew 16:21 = Mark 8:31 = Luke 9:21, 22; Matthew 17:22, 23 = Mark 9:31 = Luke 9:43, 44; Matthew 20:17-19 = Mark 10:32-34 = Luke 18:31, 32) Although Jesus was quite clear in what He said, the disciples did not understand. They understood what Jesus meant when He said that he would die; after all, Saint Peter said he would not allow it. Yet, they did not understand that He had to die, and they did not understand that He would rise from the dead. Concerning the second occasion on which Jesus spoke to His disciples about His death and resurrection, Saint Luke comments, "But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying." (Luke 9:45 = Mark 9:32) The same was true on the third occasion. (Luke 18:34) When the Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus, he said:

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:39, 40; Matthew 16:4)

Like Jonah, Jesus would be sacrificed so that others might live, and like Jonah, Jesus would after three days be delivered from death. Jesus would die, and His dead body would be placed in a tomb; yet, God would raise Him from the dead before His body underwent any decay, just as David said.

On the third day after the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene came to His tomb and saw that the stone was rolled away. She ran to find Saint Peter and Saint John, and told them that someone had taken away Jesus's body. Peter and John ran to the tomb, and John was first to arrive. John from the outside looked in, and he saw the linen clothes in which Jesus's body had been wrapped. Saint Peter, slower but bolder, went into the tomb, and there saw the linen clothes, and also the face-cloth folded, and lying nearby. Then John went in, and then he understood, and believed. Saint John comments, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." (John 20:9) When Peter and John saw the empty tomb, and saw the grave clothes lying there, then they finally understood what Jesus had taught them, that He would rise from the dead.

Peter and John went to their homes, but Mary remained at the tomb, and there she wept. Then Jesus appeared to her, but she did not recognize Him. She thought He was the gardener, and asked Him if He had removed the body from the tomb. Jesus then said her name, and she recognized Him, and it may be that she held on to Him like she would never let Him go. He told her that she must let Him go, so that He might ascend to heaven and there receive His kingdom, and receive also the Holy Spirit, whom He would send to take His place in the world. He told her to tell the disciples that she had seen Him alive, and she did as He asked.

Some time after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit directed Saint Peter to go to the house of one Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army, and one who worshiped God. When Saint Peter was with Cornelius and his household, he preached to them the gospel. He said: God does not favor one people over another, but accepts anyone who fears Him and obeys Him. God sent to Israel a message that He brought them peace through Jesus Christ. That message was that Jesus, when he was baptized by John the Baptist, received the Holy Spirit, and then went about doing good to people, even delivering people from demon-possession. Saint Peter said that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of these things. Although Jesus did good, the Jews killed Him, hanging Him on a tree so that He would fall under the curse of God. (Deuteronomy 21:13; Galatians 3:10) On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, and the risen Jesus appeared, not to everyone, but to a few whom He had chosen to be His witnesses. That Jesus was raised from the dead in a material body was evident, for He ate and drank with His apostles. Jesus commanded His apostles to preach to the people, testifying that He is the One whom God has appointed to be the judge of all mankind, that He is the One to whom all the prophets prophesied that whoever believes in Him should have forgiveness of sins.

Saint Paul, writing to the Colossians, explained the significance that Jesus's resurrection holds for the believer::

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colosians 3:1-4)

Christ died to atone for men's sins. Christ rose from the dead so that men might have new life. Christ has ascended into heaven, where He is seated at God's right hand, the position of authority, and the Christian is by baptism united to Christ in mystical union. (Colossians 2:12, 13) As Christ is in heaven above, the Christian ought to seek things that are in heaven. He ought to set his affection on heavenly things, which are eternal, and not on earthly things, which are temporal. This is to say, he ought to set his affection on spiritual things, and not carnal things. The Christian must love neighbor as himself, which means he must do good to His fellow man, and see to his needs, both material and spiritual. But the Christian must not set his affection on the things of the world; he must not be attached to the world; he must not be devoted to the world. He must be devoted to God and to His Christ. Christ by His death and resurrection gives the Christian something to live for. The Christian is dead to the world, and the world is dead to him. He belongs to Christ. The Christian, as he is united with Christ, has died with Him, and his life is hidden, which is to say, protected in Christ. Christ will one day return to earth from heaven, and when He does, those who have died in Him He will raise from the dead, and those who are alive He will change, so that all His people will be glorified with Him, never to die again.

Let us understand that Jesus is the One that the prophets said would redeem the world. Let us believe that Jesus has both died, and been raised from the dead. Let us live for Christ in this life, and hope for eternal life when He returns.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.