

[From the papers of Gordon H. Clark at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary. This sermon on 'Death and Heaven' comes from just six months before Dr. Clark's own death. The original is handwritten and uses a lot of shorthand notation, making it difficult to read in places. -DJD 23 Nov 2014]

Death and Heaven

Scripture Reading: II Kings 2:1-11

Westcliffe, 10/14/84

Probably most of you have read, or have seen in the movies one or more of Perry Mason's remarkable detective stories. There is one in which his client, a young woman, is discovered in court to have the fingerprints which the prosecution had introduced as those of the murdered victim. Apparently the young woman accused of the murder had murdered herself and was now going to be found guilty of her own death. Then she could be executed for having killed herself. Well, it was a brilliant detective story as most of Perry Mason's stories are.

However, the point I want to make is that a murder case cannot continue unless there is a dead body, a corpus delicti as the legal language has it. Unless a dead body can be produced, usually by the coroner, the accused is declared innocent.

Now, in the Bible, although it is not a matter of murder, there are two cases where there was no corpus delicti, and a third case equally strange or stranger.

After a person has lived to become an octogenarian, he can hardly avoid thinking of death. It is not a pleasant thought, but it is inescapable. Younger people too ought to think about death. One of my friends was killed in an airplane crash in Chicago when he was only 50 years old. All of you know friends or acquaintances who died before they were eighty. Though I hope it won't happen, yet it is possible that one of us right here will die tonight. Unpleasant as it is, let us think a little bit about it this morning.

In the Bible, as I said a minute ago, there are three cases stranger than any Perry Mason investigated.

The first of these three cases is that of Enoch in Gen. 5:24. The statement is very brief: “And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, because God took him.” Apparently he just disappeared and left his friends wondering what had happened to him. We do not know very much about Enoch. The only other place in the Bible where he is mentioned is found in Jude 14: “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these [evils to come] saying Behold the Lord cometh with his sainted ten thousands.”

There are two incidental remarks that need to be inserted here. First, the Greek text does not say that the Lord is coming with ten thousand of his saints. On the contrary, the word for 10,000 is the noun, and saints is the adjective. Hence the translation in the NAS is correct: The Lord is coming with his sainted or holy ten thousands. I suppose this refers to angels rather than to human beings. Then, a second incidental remark should more clearly identify Enoch. Liberal ministers have often pointed to this verse to prove that the Bible contains errors. Enoch, they say, lived not much more than a century before Christ, and was by no means the seventh from Adam. Therefore Jude made a mistake. Now, there was indeed a man Enoch who lived 100 or 150 B.C. and he wrote a book in which Jude's quotation occurs. But it seems to me that Jude said “the seventh from Adam” for the express purpose of distinguishing the Enoch in Genesis from the Enoch who wrote the book. And further, it seems that the Enoch who wrote the book was reporting as saying that had been current in Jewish circles for a long time.

Let this do for the incidental remarks on the translation of the text and the identities of the authors. We now return to the verse in Gen. 5:24: “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, because God took him.” There was no corpus delicti.

The verse in question tells us something very important, while at the same time leaves us in great perplexities. Various modernistic ministers have claimed that the Old Testament gives us no basis for believing in a future life. These modernists are almost right but entirely wrong. Compared with the New Testament the Old Testament says very little about life after death. There is a verse in Job and some hints here and there, but these two passages on Enoch and Elijah are the clearest and most certain.

One should not be too surprised that the Old Testament says so little about the future life. It says very little about the Trinity. Although there are hints the only passage that is very clear, and it is not very clear at that, is Genesis 18 where three visitors come to Abraham. These visitors come from heaven, and they are three in some verses and just one in other verses. Naturally the Jews could not exhaust the doctrine of the Trinity from this passage. Worse yet, although there are clear prophecies of a Messiah to come, they are so confused that some Jews thought that there would be two messiahs. The Old Testament was preparatory and only the New Testament gives the revelation in full. Nevertheless, God's taking Enoch to be with him is one verse where a future life is clearly indicated.

Even so, while the fact of a future life is revealed well enough, the kind of life is not indicated at all. We may assume, not because of what it says in Genesis, but because of what it says in the New Testament, that the body of Enoch was somehow changed. But how? Did it become pure spirit so that it was no longer a body? If it was still a body, did it eat meals three times a day? Paul later answers that question; and we may well suppose that Enoch found out immediately; but this knowledge was not vouchsafed to Enoch's son Methuselah, nor to his later descendants. If they wondered, we too would like to know. How much did Enoch immediately learn? Did he recognize and converse with Abel whom Cain had killed? Did he ask Adam why he had eaten the forbidden fruit? Questions such as these must interest you, for we hope that one day God will take us also to that world, even if not by a deathless translation. Unfortunately, as it seems to us, these few verses do not assuage or allay our curiosity.

We must therefore examine a second example, not of a deathless assumption, but of a missing body. This is the case of Moses, as recorded in Deut. 34:5,6. "So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in the land of Moab .. but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day."

There is nothing very peculiar about the remark about Moses' death except the fact that God buried him. It is very much like the death of any other very old man. And if the verses on Enoch give distress by little information about life after death, the account of Moses' death is no better.

Now indeed, the New Testament reveals much more information about Moses. But before advancing to the New Testament one other peculiar death in the Old Testament needs to be mentioned. To return to Perry Mason, Enoch left no corpus delicti, Moses' body was buried but no one could find

it; now this third event was even more peculiar than Enoch's translation.

This third peculiar disappearance, as you may guess in the Scripture read, is the assumption of Elijah. "Behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire ... and Elijah went up in a whirlwind to heaven."

No doubt a minister could preach many sermons on Elijah. His most spectacular exploit, though it was really God's and not Elijah's – at any rate the spectacular exploit in which Elijah took part was the great test between Jehovah and Baal on Mount Carmel. It was a crucial point in the history of Israel. The worship of Baal, enforced by the King and Queen, had almost stamped out the worship of Jehovah. Elijah thought that he was the only one left who worshipped God. The Lord told him that there were still 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Even so, 7000 was a small percentage of the population. Then after a long drought and a severe famine "The Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying "Go, show thyself unto Ahab and I will send rain upon the earth." However, before the rain came Elijah confronted the 450 priests of Baal and challenged them to call upon Baal to send fire from heaven and consume the offering on the altar. Baal did not answer. Then toward the end of the day, at the usual hour of sacrifice, Elijah prayed, "Lord God of Abraham ... hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God. ... Then the fire of the Lord fell and consume the sacrifice and licked up the 12 barrels of water, and the people said, The Lord, He is God!" Later, as mentioned a moment ago, a chariot of fire and horses appeared and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

These two events do not tell us anything about the life after; but the fiery chariots tell us clearly that there indeed is a life after death.

Elijah and Moses were the two greatest of the OT prophets. No doubt because they were the greatest, it was they who appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, where their appearance tells us a great deal more about life after death, for here heaven is opened before our very eyes.

The Gospel accounts of Christ's transfiguration are found in Mt. 17:1-6, Mark 9:2, and Luke 9:28. These passages describe something very wonderful. However, it is not precisely the transfiguration of Christ with which the sermon is particularly concerned, wonderful as it is. Rather it is Moses' and Elijah's participation in the event that now interests us. This participation was chiefly ?? ????? ??? Christ ????? the crucifixion which was soon to occur.

This N.T. account gives us more information concerning life after death than the extremely brief OT verses on Enoch and Moses. No one witnessed Moses' death; no one ever saw his dead body; no one ever found his grave. But the New Testament describes him talking with the refulgent Lord of Glory.

Now, first of all, this corroborates and extends the less explicit Old Testament indications of a future life. The Old Testament does not say much more than that there is a life after death. But the New Testament goes much further than this basic truth. Here in the New Testament Moses is not only alive, he is awake and can talk with Christ. This fact is worth some emphasis because several semi-Christian sects hold that when a person dies, the soul sleeps until the resurrection. Moses did not sleep. He was wide awake, and he consciously discussed the coming crucifixion. Therefore we too, upon our death, may be sure of being able to talk with Christ. There, that is something worth doing then, and worth knowing now.

This New Testament incident not only gives us information about our future state in heaven, but it also tells us something about ourselves as we are now. First of all it teaches that a person before death and also after death is the same person. This may sound trivial; but just think of the confusion if it were not so. If it were not so, we, we ourselves, would never get to heaven. The man who defeated the prophets of Baal must himself be in heaven, or else Elijah was never taken to heaven. Well, that is rather obvious, is it not? No doubt death and heaven change us in certain respects, but we must remain the same person.

This very Scriptural and perfectly logical point must in these days be used in opposing non-Christian ideas. At the present time many or most secularists hold to the theory of behaviorism. They say that man has no soul at all. In many or even most American universities the students are taught behaviorism in the sociology, psychology, and philosophy departments. In Detroit a nurse told me that the city required all nurses and all policemen to take a course in behaviorism. Man is supposed to have no soul at all. Life is merely the functioning of the bodily organs. The brain does the thinking just as the stomach does the digesting. At death the organs stop functioning and the person is no more. Against the secular paganism, with its attendant homosexuality and wide-spread murder of infants, we Christians take a decided stand. Somehow we must prevent the courts and bureaucracies of the land to suppress Christianity.

There are also Christians, who, though thoroughly opposed to secularism, entertain an inadequate view on the Nature of man. Of course the error is nowhere so serious as that of secularism, but it is not quite Biblical either. These people say that man is precisely the combination of body and soul: never the body alone, nor soul alone, but the combination. This is very plausible, for the Bible certainly speaks of such a combination; but, nonetheless, defining man as the combination is not quite the accurate truth. Man himself is not the combination of soul and body. This is quite clear with the account of the transfiguration. Moses was there, the real Moses, the same person who had led the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses himself was there, his body had disintegrated in Moab centuries earlier. If man is the combination of body and soul, then Moses, the real person, should not have appeared at the Transfiguration. A person is therefore the soul, and not the combination.

If this seems a little strange to anyone, he should note that Paul says the same thing, and says it much more plainly than the Gospels do. In II Cor. 12:1-4 Paul describes an experience he once had. He was caught up into paradise, but he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body. At the very least this shows that it is possible to be caught up paradise apart from one's body, and if it is possible, then man himself is not the body. He himself can go somewhere and leave the body behind.

In the same epistle, II Cor. 5:1-4, Paul describes the body as a tabernacle in which he dwells. He also speaks of the body as clothing which a person wears. Obviously the clothing is not the man himself. A few more verses below (5:8) Paul says that he is willing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. But if Paul can be absent from the body, Paul is not his body.

Similarly Peter in his second epistle, 1:13 speaks of being in a tabernacle, a tabernacle which he shall soon move out of. Since Peter himself must put off this tabernacle, he himself can not be it.

At this point some people in the congregation may be asking what is the use of going into all this? Shouldn't sermons be practical and tell us what to do? What difference does it make in our lives whether we are simply a soul or a soul plus a body? Preaching should be limited to believe that the Lord commands don't covet your neighbor's wife.

Now, there are several reasons why this is the wrong attitude. Admittedly distinguishing between body and soul is not the very most important thing a Christian should do, nonetheless there are

reasons why it should not be ignored.

First of all, the Bible gives us information about the nature of man, and if God thought it best to give us this revelation, we are obligated to pay attention to what God says. The apostle Paul says that all Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for instruction in righteousness. Hence we should study it all. We can't study it all at once, and as just said, some parts are more important than others, but it is all true, it is all God's word, and all of it should be studied.

Then, second, since we all face death, we ought to be interested in what comes afterward. The theory of soul sleep may not be altogether repulsive since it does not threaten us with pain; but the idea of being immediately taken up into glory is more more comforting. And that is what the Bible teaches.

Then, third, the nature of man and his state between death and the resurrection is not so impractical and unimportant as one might suppose. To show further the scriptural teaching on the subj. one should consider not only the translation of Enoch, not only the secret death of Moses, not only Elijah's being taken by the fiery chariots of the Lord, but indeed two other deaths.

The first of this is the death of Christ. Now, so far as the death itself is concerned, it was an ordinary, painful, brutal, Roman execution. Two thieves were crucified with him. Before the three men died, one of the thieves said to Christ, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into they kingdom." And Christ replied, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Now let us ask ourselves, where were Christ and the thief that Friday night? Their bodes were in their graves, but they themselves were in heaven. Someday our bodies will be in a grave, but I hope all of us will be in heaven.

This material is important and should interest us. The Roman Catholics have a doctrine of purgatory. They believe that after death we do not go immediately to heaven but must suffer for our sins in purgatory.

Sing a hymn:

Jesus paid it all

All to him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain

He washed it white as snow.

If the Catholics were to sing that hymn they would have to say,
Christ has paid in part
Thanks to him I say.
Sin has left a bluish stain
He washed it somewhat gray.

Romanism does not believe that Christ has paid it all. We ourselves must pay somewhat in purgatory. Now, the Romanists may believe in Enoch and Elijah, and some exceptionally devout saints may escape purgatory, but the thief on the cross was a vicious criminal. He admitted that his punishment on the cross was just. Surely he would have to spend centuries in purgatory for this life of crime. But Christ told him, today thou shall be with me in paradise.

All this is important, because it not only protects us from worry about purgatory, but it also shows us how one idea in the Bible connects with other ideas in the Bible. Scripture is not a disjointed list of true statements. They all fit together, and as a person reads or studies one chapter, he should try to think how it dovetails into another chapter.

But this is one further thing that must be said. This emphasis on the soul rather than on the body can be misunderstood, and many devout Jews in the Old Testament misunderstood it. The reason was that Moses did not have God's full revelation concerning bodies. There were few Jews who had come to believe in the resurrection of the body. Mary and Martha knew that the dead would be resurrected at the last last day. But most Jews did not believe in a resurrection or were very much puzzled. Even Mary and Martha did not believe in a resurrection before the last day. Imagine the surprise and bewilderment of the women when Mary saw the empty grave and soon after saw the risen Christ. How Mary must have been amazed. I can sympathize with Thomas when he said, Unless I can put my hands in his side, I will not believe. We call him doubting Thomas. If anyone had a right to doubt, it was Thomas. Nothing so stupendous had ever happened before. True Elisha had brought a dead boy back to life, and Jesus had raised Lazarus. But these two looked the same, went about their affairs, and died again. But the risen Christ had changed. He no longer looked the same. The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him. Yet it was really Jesus in the flesh.

But the flesh was no ordinary flesh. This body passed through a bolted door. It seemed to go from Jerusalem to Galilee without traveling the intervening distance.

Further, the account of the ascension in Acts 1:9, where a cloud received him out of their sight, suggests that there may have been still further changes. Philippians 3:21 describes Christ's body as "his glorious body." It also says more. Philippians says that Christ will change our present vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. This implies certain minor details. For example, in I Cor. 6:13 Paul tells us that God will do away with food and with our stomachs. There will be none of Lois' *[GHC's daughter]* good meals in heaven. One of our best hymns contains the line, "Change and decay in all around I see." But that will not be true in heaven. In completely general and universal terminology Paul assures us that the dead shall be raised incorruptible ... for this mortal must put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.