

The Gospel Herald

“As the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21)

For The LORD’S PILGRIMS, STRANGERS & SOJOURNERS

by
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Sleepeth and Dead

“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth: but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep”
(John 11:11)

Dear beloved heirs of grace by the free and sovereign love of our Lord Jesus Christ, I write these things as I seek the truth, which may not be revealed to me nor other mortals of this timely realm.

As I have quoted the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the title of this article, I ask the question, was Lazarus “asleep or was he dead”?

“Then Jesus said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11: 14).

I find myself puzzled as I read the account of Lazarus as set forth in the scriptures. Our beloved Saviour states that Lazarus was asleep, yet said he was dead.

Our Lord Jesus expressed to the dear sisters of Lazarus, “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. Believeth thou this?”

Knowing that it has been assumed by most biblical theologians and commentators that when believers lay down their mortal frames from this timely realm that they are immediately ushered into a heavenly realm of immortal glory. My finite mind has questioned this immediate transition after reading the account of Lazarus who was dead, yet was raised again.

Is it possible that the mortal physical body of the dead in Christ return to the dust from which it was made, yet the soul of the creature is asleep, awaiting that glorious resurrection call of our Lord Jesus Christ?

“Then said his disciples, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep” (John 11: 12-13).

The apostle Paul, in reference to those who were guilty of sacrilege of the feast of remembrance (The Lord’s Supper), stated, “for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (I Corin. 11:30). These who are asleep, are they mortally deceased? It has been assumed that this is the understanding of the text.

“Behold I shall show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed” (I Corin. 15:51-52). Now, we see in the context that Paul is referencing the physical mortal body of the believer, to the best of my understanding, yet where is the soul of the creature during the sleeping of the body?

“For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep” (I Thess. 4: 14-15). I again ask, where is the soul of those which sleep in the grave?

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we shall live together with Him” (I Thess. 5:9-10).

May I ask a couple questions to those which may have been revealed greater light on the subject than this poor author?

- 1) Where are the souls of those who have died in Christ currently?*
- 2) What are the souls of the deceased in Christ doing at this point in time?*
- 3) If the souls of the unbelieving non-elect are currently in the torments of hell (as has been believed by most bible students), why is there to be a judgment event at the great throne of God at the end of time, condemning the wicked and instructing them to depart into a second death, if they are already in the torments of hell?*
- 4) When the apostle Paul said, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”, is this an immediate transition upon mortal death, if so again I ask, what is the current state and activity of the souls of those dead in Christ? Would it not be a true thing, that if we were to be asleep in Christ, in body and soul, that the next event the elect heir will experience is being in the presence of our Lord, whether it be ten years or a thousand years, when that divine trump call occurs which shall raise ALL from the grave?*

- 5) *Knowing that “soul sleep” has not been a landmark doctrine among Old Baptists and general Christianity. Yet, I find it difficult to support the “immediate transition” of the soul from the body upon the mortal decease of the body.*
- 6) *Does it really make a difference whether we are “asleep/dead” in the grave until that trump of God is sounded? For what do those “asleep” remember or are conscious of in that “soul sleep” state?*

I am persuaded that this is a mystery (IMHO) to my understanding at this time, and do not know scripturally the truth of the matter. Possibly, someone can give me some insight on this matter of the soul being actively experiencing conscious activity in a heavenly realm. I know that most use the record of the “Rich man and Lazarus” as an example of this “immediate” transition of the soul. If this is fact, why, (as stated before) is there a Great white judgment throne to be manifest, judging the wicked unbeliever and being “re-sentenced” to enter into the lake of fire and brimstone again, if they have already been there since their mortal decease? What is the second death? Is it not the fact that those unbelieving, non-elect are then judged guilty and cast into the lake of fire at that time?

I appreciate all feedback on the matter of the soul of the creature upon physical decease and its location scripturally.

Humbly submitted,

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