

Dead Men Talking
What Dying Teaches Us about Living
Dr. Thomas S. Warren II
Review by Barbara Buzzard

Edward Fudge in his foreword considers the widely held, popular views of heaven and hell and says this: “Are these ideas really found in the Bible, or do they come from somewhere else? Beginning with the opening chapters of Genesis, Warren walks carefully through both the Old and New Testaments as he answers that question. The biblical teaching, he concludes, is that the human being does not *have* a soul but rather *is* a soul. Death is death, not life in another form or place. God’s remedy for death is the resurrection of the whole person, not a death-proof soul or spirit.”¹

Dr. Warren challenges his readers as to what “the other tree” in the Garden of Eden represented. We all know of the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, the only tree forbidden to Adam and Eve. They ate of “the other tree”, the tree of life, prior to their sin. But after their sin, God did not allow them to eat of it and “live forever in their sin...If man was going to live forever the question must be asked, ‘Why would God go to such extremes to keep Adam and Eve from the garden (tree of life) in order for him not to do that which he was already going to do (live forever)?’”²

The Problem

Dr. Warren maintains that the Bible poses a big problem to those who believe that man is naturally immortal. “God Himself contradicts such a belief by the way He treats His greatest creation, mankind. After banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden due to their sin God defines their destiny in simple terms. Since Adam and Eve were made from the ground, to the ground they would return (Gen. 3:19).”³ David understood this: “when their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.” (Ps. 146:3-4). Obviously, there is a *great divide between what is popularly thought to be the case and biblical truth*. If Warren is correct in stating that the Bible presents a big problem to those who hold the most popular view, they certainly hide it well! I am not aware of any group who are even open to discussion on this point. If questioned, they simply cite their favorite church authority, and let it be known that that authority must not be questioned. The Bible is left out, but, of course, not *seen* to be left out. “The soundest reasoning leads to the wrongest (sic) conclusions when the premises are false.”⁴

“The idea that man was brought to life by the breath of life suggests that prior to this man was in a state of ‘deadness’ (inactivity) and without life. In other words, he was dirt. According to the Bible, he was good dirt (Gen. 1:31). And even as good dirt, he could not think, feel, or take action on his own. There was nothing inherent in man’s nature to make him alive. His condition prior to God bringing him to life is the same condition in which man will exist when he dies and returns to the ground at the end of his life. For

¹ *Dead Men Talking, What Dying Teaches Us about Living*, Thomas S. Warren II, Foreword by Edward William Fudge, p. xiii, author of *The Fire That Consumes*

² *Ibid.*, p. 7

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁴ Vilhjalmur Stetansson

Adam, and all of us, to be dead means to be without the life giving spirit of God that makes dead things live.”⁵

Dr. Warren makes the point that thirty six times in the Old Testament, those who died were referred to as having ‘rested with their fathers.’ “It is quite clear from the Old Testament texts ...that death was viewed as a time when people rested from their labors, slept in the ground or dust, and awaited the time when they would be aroused.”⁶

Why Didn't Lazarus Go to Heaven?

There is a careful consideration of the death and raising of Lazarus, and the author notes that Lazarus was brought out of the grave, not out of heaven. This deserves very careful thought – why had Lazarus whom Jesus loved and considered righteous – not gone to heaven? What a contrast this story presents with popular death- bed visions and out of body experiences. Though Lazarus had been dead four days, there was no mention of what he experienced in heaven, and indeed, what kind of heaven would it have been without Jesus?

Isa. 38:18-19: “The grave cannot praise you (God), those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living –they praise you.”

Ecc. 9:5, 10: “The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing... Where [they] are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” Is it not an amazing thing that at many or most funerals it is said that the deceased is alive in heaven, having experienced an extension of life in another realm?

In our culture, death is seen almost as a friend, as the deceased is said to be in a “better place”. Often, we hear the phrase, “God took him or her to be with Him.” What a vivid contrast between this and the scriptural portrayal of death as an enemy! As the author invites – go to any funeral today and you will hear that death is an entrance to a different life. To understand (and teach!) the mortality of man actually brings great peace to the mind – at least for those who require things to make sense. Sense of what Scripture teaches, i.e. the mortality of man, beginning in Genesis and continuing to the resurrection when immortality will be granted to those who have pleased their Creator.

This book is quite short, only 107 pages. And that includes 3 appendices, one of which contains study questions for each chapter. Another appendix deals with problem passages. It is simply written and that is its strength; much of the praise given to this book is due to its simplicity. It's a great read — a pearl of great price as one could put no price on the value of this Truth. To understand this and to believe it actually brings great peace to the mind – at least for those who require things to make sense, sense of what Scripture teaches – the mortality of man from Gen. to the resurrection when immortality will be granted. Dr. Warren was a pastor for over 30 years, having received his M. Div. and D. Min. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The challenge of this book should be accepted by all who pursue truth, particularly by those who preach and teach the opposite in order that they check themselves against Scripture and deal honestly and fairly with it.

The Beginning of the End

“The suggestion that people without Christ have no hope against the grave (1 Thes. 4:13) argues strongly for the idea that death was seen as the end and not a passage to a better life...According to the Lord's own words, death would hold its grip on mankind until the second coming, at which time the ‘dead in Christ will rise first’ (1 Thes.

⁵*Dead Men Walking*., p. 9

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13

4:16)...It is impossible not to see the centrality of the resurrection when it comes to understanding what happens when a person dies...According to Christ, those who are dead will rise first at the time of the resurrection. Along with the Christians who are still alive, those who have died will meet Christ in the air.”⁷

“Throughout the Bible people are always spoken of as mortal beings or souls, for God alone is considered immortal (1 Tim. 6:16) and the gift of immortality is always seen as something received or given at the time of the second coming of Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Dr. Warren notes that according to Scripture, these are the words that describe death: silence, decay, hopelessness, absence of praise, and absence of memory. However, *the theology of man* has dead men walking, thinking, enjoying bliss. How strange. How is it possible that this quality of immortality can be experienced now when 1 Cor. 15: 52, 53 reveal that this is something that Jesus brings with him and grants at his coming? Rev. 22:12 is most enlightening: “See, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me...” How then can we receive it at death?

Saga of Corruption

These differences call into question the state of the church, i.e. “When the Bible states that man is ‘mortal,’ how did he become an *immortal* being who is on an equal plane with his creator? ⁸ And what a sobering question it is. I once was present when a clergyman stated that he agreed that the Bible taught conditional immortality but, of course, he could never risk preaching that! What an awful saga of corruption.

The scriptural viewpoint, as pointed out by Warren is that immortality is conditional, and it is therefore known as conditional immortality. “Because man is mortal the Bible says that he will not live forever unless he is in relationship with the one who is immortal and is the impartor of this gift. Man’s eternal future is conditional...’in the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality’ (Prov. 12:28). If not he is without hope and ‘to be pitied more than all men.’” (1 Cor. 15:19b).⁹ I would just like to add that the ‘relationship’ which our author speaks of is what is called in John 3:36 and Rom. 1:5, 6 “the obedience of faith.”

Let the Text Speak

Warren concludes with this: “In the beginning of this study, I asked you to join me on a journey through the Bible in a search for truth. While we have examined a lot of texts and considered many subjects, our goal has been to allow the text to speak for itself and our purpose was to seek the truth no matter how different it might be from what we already believe. In many cases it has been suggested, even argued, that the text does not match the prevalent teaching found so often in the Christian community today. Now at the conclusion of this study, we are brought to a point of decision. Specifically, does the biblical evidence speak to a view of the truth that we have not seen before and, if so, will we believe it?”¹⁰

To Be Dead is Really to be Alive?!

The simple truth is that there is life only in Christ (i.e. conditional). “The idea that man has immortality apart from Christ giving it to him at the time of the resurrection is

⁷ Ibid., pp. 17, 18

⁸ Ibid., p. 76

⁹ Ibid., p. 75

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 76

the height of spiritual arrogance."¹¹ Another simple truth is that the popular view downplays the resurrection. In fact, as someone facetiously asked – what is the point of the resurrection in that scheme – to rivet the soul back onto the body? As we are experiencing the changing of the definition of marriage, so has the system *changed the meaning of death to mean not death*, but a new phase of life. "For many, to be dead is a kind of spiritual oxymoron for to be dead is really to be alive."¹²

The author concludes by reminding us that the presence of false teaching should not surprise us; we seem to have a *propensity for doing things our own way*. We are warned against those who "...will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Tim. 4:4) "It is the conviction of the author that much of the thinking present in the church today pertaining to man's nature and his eternal destiny represents such a turn away from the truth."¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 79, Emphasis mine.

¹² Ibid., p. 25,

¹³ Ibid., p. 77