

THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR HOME

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Looking at man's long history, one thing stands out: nothing is permanent. Man, like all living things, dies and goes to corruption. His great empires, built to last a thousand years, for all their glory and splendor, pass into oblivion and are remembered only on the pages of history books. His magnificent cities, and the monuments he builds to praise his great achievements and feed his ego, lie moldering in the dust and ruins of forgotten centuries.

The one thing upon which he can count (as could the people of all ages) is sorrow, pain, heartache, vexing problems—and death. Wealth or poverty show no favorites in this respect. The problems of the ghetto-dwellers are never-ending vexations. Yet, the happiness of the rich is just as illusive, their maladies are just as aggravating, and death is just as certain even though their doctors, advisors, and counselors are renowned specialists. Their funerals may be filled with great ceremony and praise, but for all that, they are still dead. This is the lot of the educated and the illiterate, the mighty and the weak. All men are under the consequences of the curse (Heb. 9:27).

The number and size of the problems individuals, families, governments, et al., have defies description. Men at every level continually fight to find answers—only to face new problems. This is why the preacher asked:

For what hath a man of all his labor, and of the striving of his heart, wherein he laboreth under the sun? For all his days are but sorrows, and his travail is grief; yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest. This also is vanity (Ecc. 2:22f).

Again, he asked: "For who knoweth what is good for man in his life; all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" (Ecc. 6:12). Paul also said that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Rom. 8:22)—and we do. We look for something better—a way of escape—a better lot than we have. Can we expect it? Perhaps a little better—sometimes, but a life free from cares and problems and sickness? No! We will never have such bliss in this world. This is one reason why the hope of immortality is so strong in all who have seriously pondered this.

Since these things are true, what attitude should a person have toward existence in the flesh? What answers should he give to the greatest questions of life: who am I?; where did I come from?; why am I here?; where am I going? Do you, dear friend, have the courage to seriously and honestly answer these questions? There are only two alternatives.

On one side is atheism, humanism, and agnosticism—all of which amount to the same thing. Atheism holds that man is only a blob of matter, produced by blind chance, the victim of the irresistible forces of an indifferent universe; death ends it all. Redemption, reconciliation with God, and the hope of eternal life is a myth because there is no God. Only the fittest can survive, so might really does make right. Since everything is destined to extinction, Bertrand Russell's extreme pessimism was right: "Only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built" (*Mysticism & Logic*).

This is not a new answer. The preacher pointed out that many of his day thought the same thing.

Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead that have been long dead more than the living that are yet alive; yea, better than them both did I esteem him that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun (Ecc. 4:1-3).

Thank God, there is another way, an option that radically changes a person's entire attitude toward sorrow, misery, sickness, and all his other problems, including death. Of course, that alternative is belief in God. In contrast to infidelity, how satisfying are the answers it gives to those basic questions of life. Man came from God and was made in the image of God. His purpose for being is to glorify his Maker, One day he will return to his God.

This does not mean that all the sorrows and pain and problems will vanish, but they are put in a new perspective which allows us to rise above them. Pessimism, despair, fear, despondency, and hopelessness are eliminated because we can confidently say, "This world is not our home; we are here for just a little while, and then we will go home." Our faith is comparable to those spiritual giants of old about whom it is said:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11: 13-16).

It is said concerning one of them: "He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

True believers today have a like precious faith. Our beliefs are not born out of desperation nor are they based on the whimsical opinions of men. They rest on the solid evidence of God's Word. We believe because Christ came into this world of pain and grief, freed us from bondage to it, and reconciled us back to God (Rom. 8:1f). He even conquered the greatest of all fears—the fear of death (Heb. 2:14f; John 11:25f). Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

Let the infidels rant and rail and ridicule. We can confidently say with the beloved Paul:

I suffer these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).~