

Retired Pentecostal Pastor: We Can't Bring Them Back, But

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Our nation – once again – grieves heavily at the senseless loss of life at the hands of an emotionally-twisted and hate-filled individual.

Within the last three weeks, we have lost six elderly people at an ethnic fellowship at a church in Southern California, 10 individuals shopping at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, and 19 grade-school children and their two teachers in Uvalde, Texas.

The adults had lived for decades, while the children were yet in their first. Regardless of their age, they were each ripped from their families and friends and the full potential of their God-given purpose and future. We can't bring them back.

Having lost their loved ones in these terrible tragedies, their grieving family members must be wondering if they will ever see and recognize them again in heaven.

The Reassuring Words of Jesus

Only a few days after the death and entombment of his friend Lazarus, Jesus spoke to reassure his sister Martha:

"Jesus said to her, I am [Myself] the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on) Me, although he may die, yet he shall live" (John 11:23-25, The Amplified Bible, Classic).

We need to *adhere to, trust in and rely on* Jesus as Savior in our lifetimes. Innocent children were always loved and accepted by Jesus during the years of His earthly ministry. He directed His disciples to *"... Allow the little ones to come to*

Me, and do not forbid or restrain or hinder them, for of such [as these] is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14, AMPC).

What Happens to Believers' and Children's Bodies After Death?

In the midst of our human grief and sorrow, it is natural to question, "What kind of a body will a resurrected person have?" This is a common inquiry of thoughtful people who have seen human bodies maimed or massacred in life and diseased or decaying in death.

The believers in the church at Corinth had these questions, too. Paul reminded the questioning Corinthians that he himself had preached these truths to their congregation, during his time with them (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

In verses 12-20, Paul's teaching about the resurrection of the believer's natural body was contrary to those of the pagan intellectuals, in the secular culture in Corinth. Their mindset allowed for an afterlife for the spirit of man but not for the body. For them, the body was corrupt and subject to disease and decay. The thought of living forever in a resurrected, glorified body was foreign to them.

Will We Recognize Loved Ones in Heaven?

King David lost his newborn child, for whose healing he had fasted and prayed extensively (2 Sam. 12:13-23). Then he recognized that though he could not bring the child back, he could prepare to "go to him." Loved ones who remain on earth can spiritually prepare, in the remaining days or years of their lives, to rejoin their redeemed and forgiven loved ones in a life of consciousness and recognition beyond the grave.

When initially writing to the Thessalonians about the Lord's appearing and the resurrection of the saints who have died, Paul wrote, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess.

4:17).

Similarly, Jesus promised that He would go away to prepare a place for us in heaven and He would come again and receive us unto Himself so that where He is we shall be also (John 14:1-3). He offered this declaration of hope to counter the natural grief over the separation between departed and living loved ones. As “sons of light and sons of the day” (1 Thess. 5:4-11), we should be correctly informed about this important resolution to our heavenly quest.

In verse 18 of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul directs us to “comfort one another with these words.” The comfort comes from the prospect of recognition and reunion of believing loved ones in heaven. Paul’s promise that past and present believers (and—I believe—innocent children) will all be “together” (vv. 15-17) with the Lord forever implies that we shall recognize each other and renew fellowship with innocents and believers we have known, in that great “meeting in the air.”

The Divine Mystery

In verse 51, of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul declares a “mystery” or divine secret: at our Lord’s return, we all will be changed and exchange our earthly, natural bodies for heavenly, spiritual bodies! The dead in Christ will be resurrected with new heavenly bodies and the living believers will be raptured or suddenly and fundamentally changed and transformed into their new, heavenly bodies (15:42-44).

Christ’s resurrection guarantees our future. We can look with confident assurance toward the day of His “coming” (*parousia*, 15:23) at His second advent (vv. 23-25; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Death was defeated at Christ’s Resurrection and at His “coming” it will be destroyed (Rev. 20:14). Death is the last enemy to be conquered, in Christ’s total triumph (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

From then on, our risen Lord (the glorified Messiah) will take

up a permanent residence with His glorified people, with their new, spiritual bodies (vv. 45-49), prepared for their eternal future where “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” and “there shall be no more pain” (Rev. 21:4).

Let those truths bring comfort and direction for our futures.

Like King David, we can't bring our departed loved ones back but we can prepare to go to them! {eoa}

Gary Curtis served in full-time ministry for 50 years, the last 27 years of which he was part of the pastoral staff of The Church on The Way, the Van Nuys, California, Foursquare church. Now retired, Gary continues to write a weekly blog at and frequent articles for digital and print platforms.

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