

# Wisdom of the prayer Book – The Burial Service

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We have been greatly loved, gloriously loved, and we are expected, according to the New Testament, to love in return.

A very reasonable expectation, and you know how the hymn bewails failure at this point. Lord, it is my chief complaint that my love is weak and faint.

Yet I love thee and adore, O for grace to love thee more. I can tell you, friends, that's the word of my heart over and over again, and once more I will say, I hope that all our hearts resonate with it.

For the faith and the life are a love affair. And I hammer that a little bit, because we're going to talk about the burial service, and it's well, I think, that our hearts should be warned before we come to reflect on all that the burial service involves.

Let's pray before we go any further. Our Heavenly Father, as we thank you for the wisdom that Archbishop Cranmer showed long ago in the way that he crafted worship services, so we pray that wisdom from above may be given us to follow where he leads us into further wisdom, to follow you as you lead us into deeper understanding, to follow Christ, who leads us through the darkest rooms in order to bring us into the glorious light of his own resurrection glory.

[ 2 : 1 5 ] So we open our minds and our hearts and we humble ourselves before you now, Lord. Lead us and teach us, we pray, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. The idea of talking to you about the burial service as exhibiting, once again, the pastoral wisdom of the prayer book, that came to me earlier in this session, when Harvey expounded to us Psalm 90.

Do you remember that? It was a very rich exposition as I received it, and what Harvey didn't say, but what I had in mind as he spoke, was that Psalm 90 is the psalm that is set for the burial service.

And maybe you didn't know that either, but it is. And what you have in Psalm 90 is, I hope you remember, Harvey went over this in a very fruitful way, as I said, what you have, so to speak, as the bottom line in Psalm 90, is the prayer, so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

And what that means is, so teach us to reckon with the fact that life isn't endless, that is, life in this world, it is going to stop.

[ 4 : 0 8 ] A certain amount of time is given us, but it's not infinite. If we number our days wisely, we shall establish priorities for ourselves to ensure that whether the time is long or short, we've been doing the things that are of greatest importance.

And we shall measure the things that are of greatest importance by the revelation of the mind of God in Scripture, and the revelation of the terms of discipleship to the Lord Jesus, which, of course, runs all through the New Testament.

And we shall be ready when the time comes, only God knows and decides when that will be, but we shall be ready when the time comes to leave this world.

And it won't be a moment for heart-wrenching regret that we didn't order our time better, didn't establish our priorities more wisely, didn't put first things first.

when a person knows that death is close and inescapable, well, those questions, what have I been doing with the time that I've been given, press rather hard on the conscience.

[ 5 : 44 ] And I would wish for you, as I'd wish for myself, that when that pressure comes to us, as one day it will, we shall be able to be at peace in giving whatever answer we do give to our conscience and to the Savior, who is Lord of the conscience and stands behind the question.

So teach us to number our days, says the psalm, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. And you can see that that in itself is a sentiment that makes the psalm very appropriate for the burial service.

In fact, in the psalm, there is more wisdom for those who are living a life that has its ups and downs and that will finally end in this world.

You get older, says the psalm, but after a certain point, getting older isn't an achievement so much as it's a burden. If people move, if people get to 80, if they're strong enough to get to 80, four score years, yet is there pride but labor and sorrow.

In other words, daily living becomes more difficult. You may know, friends, that I am in my 80s and you're wondering what I'm saying to myself as I say these things to you.

[ 7 : 22 ] Well, what I say to you, and I'll say it very frankly so that you won't be worrying about it all through the rest of the talk, what I say to you is that I've been blessed with a young man's blood pressure and I have further been blessed with a mind and a heart that get rejuvenated in the classroom.

Now, this isn't, of course, the case with everybody but I'll tell you, I go on teaching and the very act of teaching perks me up, as we say, and makes me feel young again and though I'm in my 80s, that hasn't ceased to happen.

I expect it will but it hasn't happened yet. So, strictly speaking, I read this psalm, I nod my head and I thank the Lord that he's holding back the burden, burdensome aspect of things, the labour and sorrow for a little longer, in my case, than he does with some people.

But now, I'm just telling you why I found myself wanting to speak about the wisdom of Cranmer, the pastor, as expressed in the burial service.

As I said, it was the exposition of Psalm 90 that triggered this desire. The desire is still with me and that's why I'm actually attempting to do it this very morning.

[ 9 : 05 ] I think, however, that I need to precede what I'm going to say about the service by saying something more about the reality of death and the necessity of our leaving this world.

I think we should say, biblically, that it doesn't appear as if humans were meant to stay in this world indefinitely.

There are people who have argued that what God originally promised Adam and Eve is that if they were faithful in obedience, they would stay in this world indefinitely, but I don't think that's the right way to read the scripture.

I think that it was always intended that this life here in this world be, well, I pick up a phrase from the title of a tract by the late Martin Lloyd-Jones expounding words in Hebrews chapter 12.

The title of the tract was Life's Preparatory School. And I think that that's what this life was always meant to be.

[ 10 : 27 ] I don't think that the transition out of this world to another, which lies beyond, would have been as burdensome for Adam and Eve as leaving this world sometimes is for folk like us, had sin not come on the scene.

Sin messed up the human heart and sin messed up the human body, so I believe. And so, dying can be burdensome and distressing and painful and it would be just silly to try and gloss over that fact.

Even though nowadays in a way that was never true until our age, more often than not people die in hospital under sedation and the pains which went with the process of dying to those for whom consciousness continued until the very end, people dying a hundred years ago, that kind of thing, that's rare nowadays.

It's not part of the common experience. things. But what I'm saying in broad terms is that without palliatives of the modern type, yes, the process of dying is likely to be painful and burdensome in physical terms.

However, that I believe is one of the consequences of sin. Adam and Eve, I think, would have transitioned painlessly into the life of the world that lies beyond.

[ 12 : 33 ] I think that this is being indicated by the fact that Enoch, fifth from Adam, seems to have been blessed with a painless transition.

It simply says he was not for God took him, do you remember? Just that. And Elijah, you'll recall, was transitioned into the world to come with transport specially sent to collect him, chariot, horses.

And in the case of the Lord Jesus, though, because of the circumstances, his dying was, I suppose, the most painful dying that the world has ever seen, partly because crucifixion is the cruelest death that was ever devised in any judicial system, and partly because in his heart he was enduring something that, thank God, we shall never have to endure, and which he had never endured before, the sense of God forsakenness, which, if Scripture may be trusted, will be the permanent lot of those who die with their backs, shall I say, to the Lord.

But, that was a special case, as you will agree. And when he rose from the dead, well, there was no pain involved in that, only triumph.

death, and so it will surely be for us who are his. I'm saying these things in order to set the frame within which we shall have to face the reality of death, burial, and the burial service.

[ 14 : 34 ] I trust we all of us see ourselves in the terms in which John Wesley described himself in print in the preface to his first volume of published sermons.

Wesley was a business-like down-to-earth person, as surely we all know, and his first paragraph in the personal introduction to his sermons begins like this.

I am a creature of a day, soon to drop into eternity. I want to know one thing, the way to heaven.

God has written it down in a book. At any cost, give me that book. And so he goes on to talk about the Bible as the book of life, in the sense of the word life, the book that opens the door to eternal life for needy, fallen human beings.

And I trust we're with John Wesley there. But yes, we too are soon to drop into eternity. I like that phrase. It's a reminder that though this life is temporary, that life is final destination, it will last, it will not end, and it will not change.

[ 16 : 11 ] So then, how should we think of our own forthcoming death? death? I think the best picture to have in your mind when you think of death is of the door.

It isn't a transparent door, you can't see through it, through any windows in it, into what lies beyond, and it's a closed door until God's time comes to open it.

door, but it's a door into a larger and richer life for those who come up to it in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Another famous illustration, of course, is of the river that has to be crossed. That was the image that Bunyan used, remember, Maxine Hancock, not able to tell us very much about it because the time was already pressing on her.

Actually, one of the most wonderful things, I think, in both parts of the Pilgrim's Progress, is the way that Bunyan works up to the climax of the crossing of Jordan.

[ 17 : 25 ] It's a big thing, it's a wonderful thing, well, yes, of course, it is a big thing to leave this world and move on to the next, and it is a wonderful thing when you know that you go with Christ into the celestial city, when, in other words, you come right up to the door in hope of something through the door more wonderful than anything that you've ever yet known.

Bunyan catches all that, and those crossings of Jordan at the end of parts one and two of the Pilgrim's Progress, they are wonderfully powerful bits of writing.

I've got my Pilgrim's Progress here. If I find that I've finished my own outline and there's still time left, I might read you some of the details Bunyan gives us about the crossing of the river.

But when I think about my own demise, which will come, obviously, sooner or later, a man in his 80s has to say that, I don't think in terms of crossing the river, I do think in terms of the door opening at last, and I shall find out what's waiting for me on the other side.

All I really know is it is going to be wonderful. And the first face that I expect to see will be the face of the Savior himself.

[ 19 : 06 ] I think scripture warrants us to expect that. So, that's where I stand as I brood on death and more than death.

I brood on resurrection as well. Jesus directs me to. You will remember that still in the course of his ministry before his death, he announced himself to Martha and Mary as the resurrection and the life, and said, he who believes in me, though he die, yet he'll live, and indeed, in a deeper sense, he who believes in me will never die.

and now that he is risen from the dead, well, our hope is clear and established and his word to those who are his, all those who are his, is the word that he spoke to his disciples.

you've got it in John chapter 14 and verse 2, where he says, in my father's house are many places to rest.

If it were not so, I would have told you, and now I'm telling you that it is so. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

[ 20 : 51 ] When he said that, I'm not saying that he wasn't talking about the time of his return, but he wasn't only talking about the time of his return.

there are more comings of Christ to his people, according to the New Testament, than simply the second coming to judge the world. What he's saying to his disciples, I think, in its plain meaning, is, for each of you, there'll come a time, a date that's fixed, shall I say, fixed in my calendar.

Jesus didn't put it that way, but that is the way we should conceive it, I think. The future is all planned out by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the date of our being moved out of this world, that's in the calendar, that's planned.

It's our business to be ready for it when it comes, but it's not our business to try and predict when it will be, we simply wait until it comes. but when it comes, says Jesus, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

I think we should understand that as a promise from the Lord to everyone who is his. And I think it's marvelously reassuring, encouraging, thrilling even, to meditate on the fact that that is what my Lord has said to me.

[ 22 : 35 ] That's his promise to me as much as to anybody, not just to the eleven apostles, but to all those who are his, as I said. And knowing that he's made this promise, and that he is a promise-keeping saviour, one can have great confidence as one faces up to the awesome reality of being in due course called to leave this world, called out of this world, let me put it that way.

It's only a couple of months since I read in a letter from the head of British InterVarsity, the story of an eleven-year-old boy, and I can't remember, I'm afraid, it may have been the man's own son, if not, it was the son of a friend of his, I simply cannot recall the exact details, anyway, it was a boy that this man knew, and there he is, he's eleven years old, he's in hospital, he's got leukaemia, he's dying, they've done everything for him, but they can, and a surgeon who had worked on him at an earlier stage when they hoped they'd be able to save him, went to see him in his hospital bed, knowing that they'd done all that they could and that the lad was going to die, and apparently he was very anxious and uncertain of himself as to what the boy's state of mind might be and what he should say to the boy, and was enormously relieved when he brought up very tentatively the fact that, well,

I hear you're going to leave us, the boy apparently smiled and said, yes, I have a friend, a friend, his name is Jesus, I'm going to see him, as I say, the surgeon was enormously relieved to hear him say that, and he replied to the lad, well, Jesus is my friend too, and he will look after you, he was excused me getting a bit choked up when I tell you these things, they move me, and if they move you, well, don't apologise for it, because I'm not going to apologise for being moved by things like that, but this really is only matching what you have in the New

Testament already, one of the most amazing passages, at least to my mind, in Paul's letters, is in Philippians chapter 1, now, Philippians, you know, is a prison epistle, Paul is writing from jail, and he's in a situation where summary execution is at least a possibility, there are one or two references in the book that make that quite clear, Paul is living in a situation where the jailer may come in any day and say, well, Paul, they've decided your case, and I have to tell you, you're for the high jump, he almost makes a joke of it, you know the words, I'm sure, you may not have brooded on the fact that Paul is talking out of that real life situation, he says, in general terms, it's my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always,

Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, you'll see what he means from what we've said already, now says Paul, if I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me, and yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell, as you say, he's almost making a joke of it, because of course it isn't his choice at all, but he talks about it as if it is, I'm hard pressed between the two, my desire, he says, is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account, convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, and so on.

[ 27 : 50 ] Well, that's Philippians chapter 1 verses 20 through 23, and that's Paul's way of looking at the prospect of leaving this world.

almost, as I said, making a joke of it, as if it was his choice. He can only do that because of his unbounded confidence that to die would be gain for a person who could say to me to live is Christ.

Well, this is a temper which the church is called to catch. Let's put it that way. There are plenty of places in the New Testament which encourage us along these lines, and we've got triumphant hymns in our hymn books that do the same.

Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb, lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom. Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing, for our Lord now liveth, death has lost its sting.

So, no more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life, life is not without thee. Aid us in our strife, make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love, bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

[ 29 : 28 ] You sing this every Easter, it's wonderful. We can sing it with great joy, because we know that that's what the risen Saviour is under promise to do.

You've got the same sense of triumph in the older hymn, which again we know very well, guide me, O thou great Jehovah. When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.

Death of death, that's what William Williams calls Jesus, death of death and hell's destruction. That's who you are. Land me safe on Canaan's side.

Songs of praises I will ever give to thee. And have you ever felt the force, I wonder, of this from 2 Peter, chapter 1, where Peter, through I think the work of a man who as secretary drafted the letter for him, it's drafted in a rather more fulsome way, than is the case with the first letter.

I don't think Peter was a literary man, I think he behaved like many bosses, heads of the firm behave today. You know what I want to say, draft it for me and I'll sign it.

[ 30 : 52 ] So you've got in 2 Peter, chapter 1, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, if you practice these qualities you will never fall, for in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

You will be welcomed when you get home. Well, this is to be the Christian temper then, as we face death.

If you want the reference for that, by the way, it's 2 Peter chapter 1, picking up in verse 5, and going on to verse 11. Now, Cranmer gave us in the prayer book a service which is meant to catch and maintain that spirit of triumph over death, triumph in the Christ who has conquered death, for all the folk who are there as mourners, recognizing the loss of someone whom they knew and respected, loved, and cared for, and I think Cranmer did a wonderful job.

The richest moment for me, I'll tell you, and I'm speaking now as a clergyman, the richest moment for me is at the very start of the service, where Cranmer envisages the coffin actually being carried into the church, and there's a sort of procession therefore, led by the pastor who's taking the service, and he is given a whole series of scripture promises to pronounce, even declaim, as the burial procession moves into the church, the coffin is carried up to the front.

[ 33 : 35 ] I say, I speak as a clergyman, I feel very good, frankly, every time that it's my privilege to lead the burial procession into church, and declaim these words as I do so.

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believeth in me shall never die.

Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. We brought nothing into this world, it's certain we can carry nothing out.

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

[ 34 : 49 ] Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord, whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

For to this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

Well, isn't that terrific? As I said, it makes me feel very good to be privileged to proclaim all of that truth as I lead the burial procession into church.

And that establishes, you see, a note of trust and hope, a note of confidence in Christ's good will, and indeed in his presence in the church with his people as they commemorate the passing of someone for whom, as I say, they cared, someone whom they loved, and who now has gone on ahead of them.

[ 36 : 52 ] And this is the note, the tone, which is sustained all the way through the service. And it is part of the wisdom, I think, of the person taking the service to use his voice as best he can to keep up that tone, or keep striking that note of hope, assurance, confidence, encouragement, which those introductory sentences establish so effectively.

The next thing that the service leads the congregation into is, quite precisely, Psalm 90.

A sobering psalm, with, as I said at the beginning, a key thought. So teach us, us who are left, to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom, and be ready to move on into the next world when our time comes.

And then, scripture. The scripture that was prescribed by Kramer was 1 Corinthians 15, teaching the Corinthians something that they hadn't understood, namely, the nature of the resurrection body.

There'll be continuities, says Paul, but there'll be difference. It's sown, a natural body, it's raised, a spiritual body.

[ 38 : 42 ] Now that, of course, doesn't really tell us more than that we shall be changed. We can't imagine in advance what it will be like to have a spiritual body.

all we can say for sure is that Paul is certainly telling us it will be different and better, better than living in the body that we have now.

flesh and blood, he says, cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. And then he goes on to this, speaking to the Corinthians as if Christ was going to come in their lifetime.

Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep. That's a way of saying we shan't all have died before this happens. And yet, of course, that's, that is, just to say it that way is to be more specific than Paul is being.

The all is all the people of God. And Paul, if he were here explaining his own words, would at once say, well, that's how I meant it to be taken.

[ 39 : 57 ] There will be Christians alive when Christ comes back, but we shan't all of us be, we shan't all of us be alive.

However, we shall all be changed. That's how he goes on. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the trumpet shall sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible.

And we shall be changed, this incorruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal should have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

Finally, decisively, completely. Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law, but all of that is behind us now.

Thanks be to God which gives us the victory, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, there is a wrinkle there which needed to be mentioned at some stage.

[ 41 : 11 ] Our re-embodiment, the full entry, in other words, into life in and through a resurrection body, that will have to wait until the Lord comes again for judgment of the world.

In between, well, we depart to be with Christ which is far better. So we know for sure that fellowship with him will be closer than ever it was in this world, but we shall be without bodies in which or through which to express all that we would like to express, I can say that confidently I think, all that we would like to express in the way of response to our Savior and his love.

I illustrate this from Johnny Erickson, you know she is, she's a quadriplegic, her body won't work, at least not for the purpose for which God gave us bodies, which is expression.

Just think how we use our bodies to express things. Think of love relationships, parent and child, husband and wife, we use our bodies to express our love.

Well, between going through the door and Christ coming again, we shan't have bodies which we can use for that purpose.

[ 42 : 44 ] But the fellowship will be there and with ourselves in the state in which we find ourselves, we shall for sure find ourselves wanting from the heart to do as much as ever we can to express love to the Savior who loved and redeemed us and we shan't feel any sense of loss or deprivation in that we shall just know that when we get bodies, resurrection bodies like that of Jesus, it will be even better.

Well, this is the teaching of 1 Corinthians 15 which Cranmer prescribed for the burial service. And though it's a long reading, it actually is very often either abbreviated or substituted for in burial services today, it seems to me that it's the right reading, the ideal reading, and it's triumphant reading, it maintains this mood of victory through the resurrection of the Savior.

You noticed at the end of the passage I read, it's the end of the lesson, death is swallowed up in victory, oh death where is thy sting, grave where is thy victory, thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then on that basis we profess our faith, as you do in all the main services of the prayer book, saying the creed is a way of identifying ourselves before the Lord as his people who through his grace believe his truth concerning the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the whole Christian order of things.

And having said the creed, we pray, and what we pray for is not the welfare of the departed, we give praise for the departed rather than praying for them.

[ 45 : 11 ] This has always been, it seems to me, the best answer that one can give to people who want to pray for the departed. Well, the Lord has saved them and taken them to glory already, praise for that rather than pray for them.

That's the thing to do. And as we praise for the grace that has taken the departed believer into a richer and more joyful life with Christ than any that he or she knew down here, so we pray for ourselves that we may have peace and strength, wisdom, and steadiness to go on as faithful servants of Christ until our moment comes.



Somewhere in the service it will be appropriate to do what in fact we regularly do, although the liturgy itself doesn't prescribe it, and that is to celebrate the grace of God in the life of our departed friend.

This is done in different ways. Nowadays the common thing is for folk who knew that person well to speak in memory and celebration about that person and the way that God's grace and goodness appeared in that person's life.

I have done a lot of homework, as I think you know, in the 17th century with the Puritans, and the Puritan way was always to have the preacher who would preach an expository sermon straight after the scripture reading, have the preacher include the celebration of God's grace in the departed person's life at the end of the sermon, and indeed to craft the sermon in such a way that it would naturally lead to that celebration.

[ 47 : 34 ] Well, it's appropriate the grace of God in human lives ought to be celebrated at such a time. And that's what we do.

Are we right to do it? Yes, I think so. And so, having prayed for ourselves, the most comprehensive of the prayers actually is envisaged as being spoken at the graveside, what's in view in the drafting of the prayer book, is that the service has taken place in church, now it's time for the interment, the coffin having been brought in, is carried out.

Of course, in these days of cremation, this has to be adapted, but the prayer book pattern is that the coffin that was brought in at the beginning is carried out to the grave, and things are said and prayers are made which confirm already what has been said in church.

And I would like to read the comprehensive concluding prayer that the minister is told to use at the graveside.

it goes like this, O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believeth shall live though he die, and whosoever liveth and believeth in him shall not die eternally, who also hath taught us by his holy apostle Saint Paul not to be sorry as men without hope, for them that sleep in Jesus.

[ 49 : 31 ] We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin into the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him as our hope is this our brother doth, sister, and that at the resurrection in the last day, we, with him or her, may receive that blessing which thy well-beloved son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear thee, saying, Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Grat this we beseech thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our mediator and redeemer. yes, it's fulsome, yes, it's rich, yes, it crystallizes our hope in Christ as well as celebrating our hope for the person who, so it's understood, has died in Christ.

Christ is the focus, Christ is the savior, the savior. Christ is the friend who takes us home to see him, and Christ is the one who will himself open the door and let us, I'm sure, see him immediately the door is opened.

So this is our hope, this is our triumph, this is our certainty, this is our confidence, and I present to you the service, the service of burial in the prayer book as another of Cranmer's pastoral masterpieces for focusing and sustaining our hope in Christ, which he does of course in all his main services, here he is doing it yet again at a very sensitive moment, he knows, for most of the people who will be in every funeral service, they will be mourning, they will be sad, they will be thinking as mourners do of themselves having lost this person who has gone ahead, rather than rejoicing, you see, at this person's advance into richer blessing, and the service is intended, if you will allow me a colloquial phrase,

I hope you will feel that it fits, Cranmer intends his service to buck them up spiritually, and send them on their way, confident in hope, I won't say rejoicing, but certainly confident in hope, hope, and at the very least, smiling in the certainty that the Christ who loves them will one day lead them into glory too.

[ 52 : 53 ] It is, of course, a service for Christian people, and it raises pastoral problems of its own when it's used for someone about whose faith it's hard to be certain, but I've been expounding it in ideal terms, a service of burial, triumphant, hopeful, forward-looking, encouraging, for the living, not for the dead, but for the living, who mourn, or at the very least want to acknowledge in a solemn way the passing of someone whom they knew and loved.

That's the ideal situation for which the service exists, and looking at it this way, and thinking about its contents, well, I hope that it brings us hope and encouragement also in this room this morning.

Okay, friends, let us discuss. Let us discuss. I think these things are wonderful and rich, but that doesn't mean we should stop thinking about them, so I'd be very glad to hear what you have thought about some of these matters, and questions, comments, anything that you'd like to say.

I've been to a number of funerals of scallywags, rejecters of Christ, and that type of state.

The encouragement still exists through those funeral services, and they seem to be promises, you know, don't worry, everything's alright, which is very helpful, I suppose, to the families, and people like that.

[ 55 : 06 ] But, would you say that's still a strength in the service, or, it's not a time for evangelism, I suppose, but, it does happen that if you know the individual, and he knows his or her rejection of the good news, throughout their life, and yet, the church has all of the encouragement that everything's okay.

Well, such situations require wisdom, on the part of the pastor who plans and takes the service, good, and under those circumstances, he presumably will be aware that this is a service for, you use the word scallywag, so I'll use it, this is a service for a scallywag, but there is such a thing as the judgment of charity, where you can't be certain of good for someone, but yet you hope for it, and you leave the outcome to the Lord.

The person taking the service can, I think, endure, can I think, make sure, with the liturgy, Cranmer has left us, and that we still have enough per book, he can make sure that the focus is on the reality of Christ's conquest of death, the reality of Christ's offer of salvation, including the conquest of death, to the congregation.

I wouldn't say it isn't a time for evangelism, I would say rather it is important that in such a case, that in the preaching that is fitted into the service at some point, in the preaching all the emphasis is on Christ, his grace, his promise, and the fact that he is alive, mighty to save every person in church.

And I would think that the wise preacher will not encourage speculation about the person departed, he will simply say, the way of life, which we celebrate in this service, is the way of faith in Jesus, the risen Lord.

[ 57 : 48 ] Such circumstances are difficult. I'm an Anglican clergyman, fairly standard sort, I think, at this point, I take refuge in the judgment of charity.

I hope, even when I'm not certain, and I am not going to say anything that will distress folk at the burial service with regard to the person gone before, I shall try to make the service mean something to them, something evangelical, something Christ-centered, something that brings them closer to the Savior, in terms of embracing him and the hope that there is in him for themselves.

I hope that doesn't sound, Bill, as if I'm dodging the issue. It's making the best of an awkward situation, which pastors again and again find that they have to do.

Yes? On the cross, Jesus promised that on this day he would be with the imperative. Yes, he did. Some of the liturgies, there's talk about he went to hell or something and descended for a few days.

I just can't sort of recognize, I don't understand how that really works. Is he in the faith of heaven or is he going there? Well, the doctrine, I think, is really straightforward.

[ 59 : 23 ] Jesus really died. That's the way of saying that he entered into the realm of those who have departed this life.

In that realm, there is at least, what shall I call it, a department, a section, a dimension, an area, which Jesus spoke of as paradise.

And he said, to the penitent thief, as you rightly remind us, today, you'll be with me there. So, he certainly was there.

When the creed says he descended into hell, there are, I'm afraid, verbal confusions involved in what's being said, and you have to sort them out.

I will now sort them out as best I can. Hell in the 16th century, when the creed was put into its present form in English, hell at that time was the word used comprehensively for the realm of the departed.

[ 60 : 38 ] And paradise was a subsection of hell, and Gehenna was a subsection of hell. I mean, that's how words were used, that's what was understood.

So, when it says he descended into hell, it doesn't mean he went into Gehenna, which is the place of final separation from the father. It does mean that he really died and went personally where all those who really die go, that is, into the realm of the departed, through the door, to use the image that I used.

Then, on the third day, he rose from the dead. You have to remember that he was as truly divine as he was human, and is human, and that it is the way of God to make himself personally present to any number of people at the same time.

Many here in this room, there are 50 of us, perhaps, well, the Lord Jesus is giving each of us his undivided personal attention at this very moment. So is the Father, so is the Holy Spirit.

Undivided personal attention. God can do that. And the fact, therefore, that Jesus was with the penitent thief in paradise, because of the man's last minute faith in him, that doesn't preclude the fact that on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples, 40 days later, ascended to heaven, and is now making himself personally present to every single Christian on the face of the earth.

[ 62 : 29 ] He does that by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Allow for that dimension then, and allow for the fact that in the 16th century, the word hell was used in this way, which is quite misleading for us in the 21st century, when we keep the word hell for Gehenna, the place of final separation of lostness.

Does that sort it out? Sure, I think your hand went up first. Yes, ma'am? Is there any place in a burial service for the celebration of the life of the deceased person?

Not prescribed in the liturgy, but as I said, it is regularly and appropriately inserted somewhere in the service, and done actually at different points in the service according to how it seemed best to the people planning that service.

But yes, celebrating the grace of God in the life of a Christian who's departed is something we ought to do, and it would be improper not to, I think.

There was a hand. Yes, Betty? I was wondering, do people normally prearrange their own burial services? Oh, it depends entirely on the person.

[ 64 : 03 ] Some do, some don't. If one prescribes the contents of one's burial service, prescribes hymns, for instance, well, those left behind, or maybe the executive of the will, out of respect for the one who's departed, will take care to observe those wishes.

It is up to the individual as to whether he expresses wishes or not. I may perhaps tell you without disrespect to anyone, that my wife is very, very purposeful prescribing hymns for her own funeral, but she changes them about once a year.

So that I am a little tense, you know, about how things might be if she goes first.

and I sometimes thought of drawing up lists of hymns for my own funeral, but I never yet have done it. You aren't required to and it isn't letting anybody down if you don't.

There's freedom there and one does what one would like to do. Yes? I guess it would be a pastoral concern.

[ 65 : 43 ] My grandparents, I'm realizing that there's a difference in terms of Christian generations, in terms of their generation and my generation, the way we view Christian death.

I know they tend to want to talk a lot about their death and about the death of those around them, which is happening much more frequently, and about their burial and they worry that because we're so far away we won't be able to tend their graves and things like that, whereas in my generation, if you were a Christian you think more that perhaps death is important to be prepared for, but you don't necessarily, like the importance of tending, you won't be raised but it's not as important.

I was just wondering if you might have any, what is a good way to do these sorts of things and a way to maybe talk to my grandparents and it would help them? Well, you're right, let me say this first, to say that there's been quite a cultural shift at this point between folk, how shall I say it, folk something, something between 60 and 100 years ago as they were then and folk today and in this city of Vancouver as I guess you know there is no space left for burial of coffins in the earth so everybody has to be cremated or a funeral procession has to go to a burial ground which will be a minimum of 20 miles away.

Well, is there, you might ask, is there a problem when instead of a burial in a coffin you practice cremation?

Personally, I don't think there is a problem. I think that certainly the resurrection body, when we're given it, will have continuity with the body that we've got now.

[ 67 : 49 ] That will mean, certainly, that we can, we shall be able to recognize each other somehow. Bodies, amongst other things, are for recognition, God will recreate bodies for us.

He can do that as well out of dust that has come out of the crematorium just as he can do it with dust that has come out of the ground where the body is moldered away.

in either case, the important thing is respect for the departed and you show respect for the departed by being careful in what you do with the corpse.

Use that word. Tending the grave in the old days in the Welsh village that my wife came from, I know all about this, that was a way of showing respect for the person who had died.

Here in Vancouver, you can't do it quite that way, but, you know, in the front of this church, there's a garden of remembrance where a lot of ashes are interred and names are recorded, and you're encouraged to go, stand, or sit, think, pray, praise, and make it a sort of oasis for your spirit as you move along with the living of your day.

[ 69 : 40 ] as I said, I think the important thing is remembering with gratitude to God all the things that were good and gracious about the person departed, and that's a matter of what goes on in the mind rather than of, well, any particular form of action in relation to what again I will call that chilling word, the corpse.

Yes, I think you came next. I just wanted to pick up on your comment, but also to address this young lady's question. I think the intent behind who will care for my grave is who will remember me.

Whether you have flowers on the grave or the lawn is mowed or whatever, I think it's not the major intent of the person making that request, I think they want to be remembered.

And we can give them that kind of assurance by talking to them and about them while they are still alive. Most of us do tend the grave metaphorically of relatives that we have deeply loved by referring to them after they have gone and remembering happy occasions or something that is precious.

and if this is a grandparent or whoever that would benefit from that kind of reassurance we can certainly do that while they are still alive. That's a good comment. Thank you for it.

[ 71 : 16 ] Right at the back there, yes. And then there's somebody over the side. Is faith furthered? I think the problem doesn't discourage this too much, but is faith furthered by an expectation of angelic activity at death?

Because the scriptures have the angels active in some way, don't they? But I'm not sure it might be discouraging me again as I say by that tension.

An appropriate expectation of that. I think myself, Harvey, that the bottom line in scripture is that though indeed there are many, many angels, and they are constantly active in the service of God, they are regularly invisible, keep themselves invisible, in relation to us.

So that it's possible for us to live year after year without ever experiencing anything of which we would appropriately say, well, surely that was from an angel.

Every now and then things happen that do make you wonder and get into testimonies, you know, surely this was an angel.

[ 72 : 44 ] I'm thinking of a guy I know who is now a pastor of a church out in Africa. in his youth, he went wild and got into drink and drugs, and at one point decided to commit suicide by driving his car at high speed into a brick wall.

Well, he did it. Of course, the car burst into flames. the next thing he knew, he was on grass at the side of the road.

He wasn't in the car, and there was somebody there, I can't remember all the details now, I think just one person there, who said, there were two people who pulled you out of the car, saw them do it.

I don't know where they'd gone, and nothing was ever seen of those people. Angels? Perhaps. And I'm thinking again of a person I know, well, you would know her name too, you know who Elizabeth Elliot is.

A friend of Elizabeth Elliot's engaged in youth, their youth, in pioneer ministry, in jungle situations, the like of which hardly exist today, jungle situations in South America.

[ 74 : 29 ] The situation was that people from a tribe had come expecting, planning to do violence to the home and the missionary in it, and had been kept at bay by a big male looking figure who stood in front of the tent in which the missionary was sleeping, and scared them off.

Angel? Your guess is as good as mine. Things like that do happen, but they happen very, very rare and there's never been anything in my life that has suggested to me that this was particularly an angel making, what shall I say it, making his presence known by what happened, and it may be that there's nobody in this room who would want to tell a story of what looked like angelic ministry.

It is very rare, and it isn't special of course when it comes. What is special is the fact that the Lord is looking after all of us all the time, whether we are aware of angels and their part in it or not, whether we are aware of what he is doing for us or not.

[ 76 : 23 ]

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.  
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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