

John 8:51

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I must accept that my age has something to do with it, but it is a fact that I have become aware that the number of my contemporaries has become much smaller. During the last few years I have frequently received news of the passing of someone with whom I grew up, or whom I regarded as a dear friend or co-worker in the Gospel, and, as many of you know, this has, for me, come closer to home because I have this year had to cope with the passing of Isobel, my dear wife and fellow-labourer for 66 years, and it has been an extremely painful experience.

But whilst the ache still remains, I am thankful that today I am able to say that I now see something which I never really saw before.

I have read again the Lord's own promise found in John.8:51 – a promise that is so clear and unequivocal that we are tempted to suspect that it means something different from what it plainly says!

“Verily, verily I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death”. (R.S.V.)

Will you think what that brief statement means? I assure you that if you really understand what the Lord is saying, you will never again be afraid of Death. In fact, you will know what Paul means when, in that wonderful chapter, 1st Corinthians 15, at verse 51, he exclaims triumphantly, “O Death! where is thy sting?”

The solemn assurance

Take the first two words, “Verily, verily”. Pay attention whenever you encounter them in the scriptures, because they prepare you to receive something of immense

importance. What follows them is never a cheap throw-away statement, but something to be grasped and treasured.

“Truly, truly I tell you.....” Jesus says.

Putting it another way, He says,

“I give you my solemn promise”.

The Promise

Listen to this!

“Whoever keeps my word will never see death”.

Just what does it mean? Well! Let us understand, first, that Jesus is not saying that whoever believes in Him will *never die*, because physical death is a reality – a fact – which we encounter whenever we watch the TV. News, or open a daily newspaper. I know that religious history records the statements of strange people like Mrs Mary Baker Glover Eddy, founder of the so-called “Christian Science” organisation, who incredibly and illogically, denied the existence of death, describing it as ‘an error of mortal mind’.

You and I *know* that death is real, and that, for vast numbers of our fellow-men, its consequences are very real and often quite overwhelming.

No! Jesus does not deny that the believer dies. What He says is that the believer will not ‘see’ death; and it is the meaning of the word ‘see’, in this statement, which explains what He promised.

‘See’

In the Greek language there are about 20 different words which mean ‘to see’, and which relate to ‘seeing’ in one way or another.

The one which Jesus uses in His statement in John 8:5i, is the word *'theoreo'*, which, according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, describes someone who *'looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose'*

But notice this! The Lord says that the believer will **not** 'see' death! He will **not** look on death as being of any importance! He will not be like the unbeliever who has no hope in death, and who, therefore, looks on death as a fearful thing.

Death means little to the Christian, because he has the assurance of the Lord Himself that it is merely the door which opens to bring him into the presence of Christ.

This is why Paul could cry "*O Death, where is thy sting*", and why he could tell the Philippians that he had a desire to "*depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (Phil.1; 23).

And to the Christians at Corinth he wrote that he was *'willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present (at home) with the Lord'*. (2nd Cor. 5:8)

This is what I have long believed and preached. But having come to the subject from a different angle and having obtained a more personal acquaintance with it, I see more clearly than ever before, that we have no cause to grieve when our loved-ones pass through that Door, nor reason to fear when our own time comes. Our Lord has assured us that death is but a moment's passage through an experience which we may never fully understand, which brings us into His dear Presence.