

God's Thoughts on Life and Death

#0664

Study given by W.D. Frazee

My subject tonight is life and death, and what *God* thinks about life and death.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” Isaiah 55:8-9.

Notice that God is comparing, or rather *contrasting*, His thoughts and our thoughts; He says they're not the same. Now who do you think ought to change his mind?

There are millions of people in this world who are trying to get God to change His mind. Much of what is called “religion” is devoted to an endeavor to get God to change His mind. That's the way the *heathen* do. They go to their temples by the thousands and the millions. They do all sorts of things and pray all sorts of prayers. They put themselves through various tortures even. They make all sorts of sacrifices in an endeavor to get the Deity to change His mind. You and I believe that all that is futile and fruitless, that it can't accomplish anything, and it would be too bad if it could. We believe what the Bible says:

“I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” Malachi 3:6.

Our hope is in the unchangeable character of God. What a strange universe we would have if God would do something today because of the whims of some individual, and change tomorrow if another individual should be more earnest and engage in greater intercession. Life would be very uncertain, wouldn't it?

God says that His thoughts are not like our thoughts. That does not mean that it's impossible for us to ever learn to think as God thinks. Paul tells us:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”
Philippians 2:5.

We are to have the mind of Christ. We are to think as God thinks. That's a process of training and education—*transformation*. But certainly, when we reach the place where we think as God thinks, our thoughts will be as different from the world around us as God says His thoughts are different from our thoughts now.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Eventually, everybody in the

universe is going to recognize that. There will be a unanimous agreement that God knows what He's doing. He *has* known all along.

Let's look at a few examples of how God's thoughts are different from man's thoughts.

The prophet Elijah went out under a juniper tree and prayed a prayer. Oh Lord, take away my life for I am not better than my fathers. Elijah wanted to die. Did God want him to die? No. God wanted him to live; He wanted him to *never* die. But that day under the juniper tree Elijah was not thinking like God. He was praying to die. God said, No.

Elijah is now in heaven. He went there in a chariot of fire. Did he ever die? No, he never died, yet he's the man that prayed to die. He is one of the few men in the Bible of whom that's recorded. Do you see that God's thoughts are not like our thoughts?

Let's look at Moses. He prayed about this problem of life and death too, and he prayed to live. He said, Oh Lord let me live and go over the Jordan, and let me see that goodly land. God said, No Moses, you are going to die. Elijah prayed to die, and God said, No Elijah, you're going to live and never die. Moses prayed to live, and God said, No Moses, you've got to die.

Moses was insistent about it; he didn't stop with asking once. He kept right after the Lord on the matter until finally God told him to not ask anymore. Of course, we understand that God took no *pleasure* in the death of Moses. We understand that God would have been very happy if Moses never had to die; God wanted him to live, but under the *circumstances*, it was the best thing for Moses to die.

That's the way *God* looked at it. Yet, in all that, God had a mysterious providence. While God didn't save Moses from *dying*, He did save him from *death*. Jesus came down and, although challenged by Satan, brought Moses forth from the grave and took him to heaven. That was soon after Moses laid down his life there on top of mount Pisgah. Where is he now? He's in heaven, and he's been there for a long time.

So death reigned from Adam to Moses (Romans 5:14). What was there about the experience of Moses that broke that reign of death? Moses was the first one that ever went into the grave and came out. Do you think Moses was satisfied after he got to heaven? Yes. And later, Elijah and Moses met on that part of the land that Moses had wished so much he could get into. Did he finally get there? Yes, he got there.

There is no sincere prayer that is ever lost. But God has His ways of answering our prayers. I think Moses and Elijah both have been thankful now for many years that God answered their prayers according to *His* thoughts instead of according to *their* thoughts.

I come to this question: How can death ever be the best thing that can happen to a person? Before I ask "*How* can it be?" I echo the question "*Can* it be?" Yes.

I'll read you a statement. It's just a little sentence, less than two lines, but it will bear a great deal of study and meditation. Some people won't know how to fit this sentence into their building. They haven't made room for it, their temple isn't big enough. They will have to tear down some of their building blocks, their little playhouse, they're going to put this one in and get a bigger foundation, and there won't be room for it. And may I tell you, in dealing with references, never chisel the reference to fit your building. The time will come when you will need the block just as big as God made it. It would be too bad if you chiseled it all up so it's only half as big as God made it. You need the full reference, the full statement, the full *truth* of every statement that God has ever made.

I remember hearing our Bible teacher at the medical college, Elder R.S. Owen, say that years before, in his study of the Bible, he came to a text that he couldn't understand. The more he studied it the less he understood it, and he almost wished it wasn't in the Bible. He finally concluded that there was nothing for him to do but just let it alone for the time being. He went on with his study of other texts.

A long time afterward, he was studying along a certain line of thought, putting texts together as he studied. He was a wonderful Bible student. As he was getting various texts together the thought came into his mind, 'Now if I just had a scripture that said so and so it would fit right in here.' Then it dawned upon him that the very scripture that, years before, he had almost wished wasn't in the Bible was the one that fit. Now he was *glad* it was in the Bible. He found out where it fit. He put it in and used it.

If you don't know what to do with this statement that I'm about to read, don't try to whittle it or chisel it or use the saw or plane or even sandpaper on it. It's all right just the way it reads. I am glad it's here friends, for I am dealing with some very practical things.

"Some died in the days of Christ and in the days of the apostles because the Lord knew just what was best for them" *Medical Ministry*, page 17.

Sometimes I hear expressions that sound like this: "If all our people were where they ought to be, we wouldn't have this thing of people getting cancer. At least if they did they would get *healed*. And if we were only where we ought to be, then we would see miracles wrought and the sick raised up." Such expressions are not always worded the same way, but that's what it boils down to. Here is something that sounds just about like it:

"If we will take hold of the Master, take hold of all the power He has given us, the salvation of God will be revealed. Let me tell you that the sick will be healed when you have faith to come to God in the right way. We thank God that we have the medical missionary work. There must be a reformation through our ranks. The people must reach a higher standard before we can

expect the power of God to be manifested in a marked manner for the healing of the sick" *Ibid*, page 16.

That says almost what I said, but not quite. Our difficulty is that we read something and then *infer* something. We read that under the loud cry miracles are going to be worked, the sick are going to be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. We infer then that, if we were there *now*, that would be the answer to all of these problems, and we wouldn't have to have funerals. Instead, we would rejoice as one case after the other came to be a miraculous manifestation of God's power.

It would be very well if we think through some things. I call your attention to the simple statement that, even in the days when Jesus was on earth, some died. But that isn't all it says. We know some died. But it says the *reason* they died is because the Lord knew just what was best for them. That's the thing I want you to see—that it also says it was in the days of the apostles. Christ left with his apostles and His church the power to work miracles in His name. Did they do it? Yes. Peter and John raised that lame man, and helped him to walk so that he leaped all around the temple. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. Paul raised a man from the dead. All that happened and thousands more healings and miraculous manifestations.

But some died. In the midst of all those mighty manifestations, right then and there when the power of God was being poured out as it had never been before and as it has never been since, some were not only sick, but they got so sick they died. And the reason they died wasn't because they lacked *faith*, or it wasn't because somebody *else* lacked faith. There was *plenty* of faith. They died because the Lord knew just what was best for them.

Please linger on that little word "best." It's hard to improve it. It's not the comparative, it's the superlative. Do we think like that? We don't naturally. If you understand what I just read you are nearer thinking the thoughts of God than most people are. I must confess, I am so human that, if anyone I love is lying sick and near the point of death, the thing I want is for God to *heal* them. I'm just that human. I believe this because it says so. But I've been trying to understand it and comprehend it, to get my mind wrapped around at least one part of it. I think I need to. I think a number of us need to.

We're in the time of the latter rain. But we've been there for a *long* time. We are like people who come up and say to the man at the railroad station, "What time does the train for Chicago come through here?" He says, "It comes through at 1:15." We say, "Well, has it already come and gone?" He says, "No it hasn't. It's overdue."

We have been in the time of the latter rain for many years. Is it here yet? Not in the sense in which inspiration presents it in all its glorious mighty power. But my point is, we're in the time of the latter rain. We need to understand not only what the latter rain will do but what it *won't* do. It will not confer immortality upon people. That is reserved for the sounding of the trumpet and the appearing of Jesus in the clouds of heaven. That's what the Bible teaches. This mortal must put on immortality at the sounding of the trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51-55). So the saints will still be mortal during the latter rain and the loud cry, and we need to understand that *now*.

When the latter rain falls and the loud cry is given, and we will see this one healed and that one healed and this one perhaps raised from the dead, then we gather around the bed of some loved one that we think so much of, pouring out our hearts in prayer, expecting *that* one to get up just like 50 *others* have. But if, instead, that one goes down into the grave, we need to have such an understanding of God's will and God's word and God's way that we're not discouraged either with God or the experience of that individual. We need to have that very clear in our thinking.

We need to weed out of our conversation the expressions as this: "If people only had enough *faith*, that person would be *healed*." Some died in the days of Christ and in the days of the apostles because the Lord knew just what was best for them.

I raise this question: What is the purpose of life? Why do men die? When *should* men die, if *ever*? The following statement says it was best for some people to *die*, and that's *why* they died even when Jesus was here on earth.

What is the purpose of life, and when should people die? Is there a time to die? Yes, there is. The third chapter of Ecclesiastes and the second verse says so.

Did you ever hear a little child, when mother says, "Well, darling, it's bedtime now," say, "Oh, mama, can't I stay up a little longer?" What happens then?

There's been many a soul in this world that, when heaven's bedtime has come, has looked up to God and said, "Oh, can't I live a little longer before I go to bed?" But if it's really *heaven's* bedtime, it's a good thing to go to sleep.

"We have united in earnest prayer around the sickbed of men, women, and children, and have felt that they were given back to us from the dead in answer to our earnest prayers. In these prayers we thought we must be positive and, if we exercised faith, that we must ask for nothing less than life. We dared not say, 'If it would glorify God,' fearing it would admit a semblance of doubt. We have anxiously watched those who have been given back, as it were, from the dead. We have seen some of these, especially youth, raised to health, and they have forgotten God, become dissolute in life, causing sorrow and anguish to parents and friends, and have become a shame to those who feared to pray. They lived not to honor and glorify God, but to curse Him with their lives of vice.

"We no longer mark out a way nor seek to bring the Lord to our wishes. If the life of the sick can glorify Him, we pray that they may live; nevertheless, not as we will but as He wills. Our faith can be just as firm, and more reliable, by committing the desire to the all-wise God, and

without feverish anxiety, in perfect confidence, trusting all to Him" *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, page 148.

Oh friends, I want to learn right now. That's the simplicity of a little child. When mother or daddy announces to a little child that it's bedtime, do you know what the little one should say? "All right. Goodnight. I will see you in the morning." That's trust. That's what God is looking for.

Shall we not pray for the sick? Sure, we *should* pray for the sick. God *told* us to. It is safe to do everything He says. But the same God that told us to pray for the sick told us to pray that *His* will might be done, and to admit, and not be *apologetic* about admitting, that we don't know enough to know what God's will is in any case. Do you see what I mean?

Now I come back to my questions: What is the purpose of life anyway, and when is it time to die? God has already told us in Ezekiel the third chapter, the first and second verses, that there is a time for everything and there is a time to die. Now look at verse one:

"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" Ecclesiastes 7:1.

Did you know that was in the Bible?

Most people think of a birthday as a wonderful day. A child is born and people send out announcements, and congratulations come in. Everybody makes a great ado over it. The 365 days roll by, and there's a cake with one little candle on it. Everybody is happy. Why? It's a *birthday*! They're *celebrating*! That goes on year after year. A birthday is a wonderful thing. After all, we wouldn't be here if we hadn't been born; so it's quite important.

But the wise man says that there is something better than the day of one's birth. He doesn't say the day of one's birth isn't good. He just says there is something *better* than that. What is it? The day of *death*.

No wonder God says His thoughts aren't our thoughts. Some of you will agree, before we get through this study, that there are some things about the day of death that are *much* better than the day of birth.

"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" Ecclesiastes 7:1-7.

There is something about human life, and especially in this modern 20th century, that wants to keep everything running in a way of laughter and gaiety and mirth, as if that was the great end of life. Some of the highest salaries in this world tonight are paid to comedians. Some of those comedians have ulcers. They get sick and tired of it themselves; but they have to keep it up, for that's the way they earn their money.

The wise man (and he had plenty of that to draw on) tasted everything this world offered. He said that's it's better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting—you will learn something about the meaning of life.

Let's go back to our first verse and see if we can get at the real key, the real germ. "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." Those two thoughts are linked together—the good name with the day of death.

A name in the Bible stands for character. A person who has developed a good character has accomplished the purpose of life. A person whose name is written in the book of life, never to be blotted out, has accomplished the reason for which he was born. To develop that character is the work of a lifetime. It is the work of life to develop that character—that good name that's better than precious ointment. And when that work is completed, when that character is developed, the great purpose of life has been accomplished as *God* views it. Then it's "bedtime."

When everybody in this world has reached that point, we call that "the close of probation." But most of the people who have ever lived in this world have had *their* probation closed by death. And very few people have ever closed their probation *until* death. Death marks the close of probation for nearly all who have ever lived in this world.

Let's look at the close of probation for a minute. You and I look forward to the close of probation, and we know that at that time he that is unjust will be unjust still, and he that is righteous will be righteous still. I want to ask you something: When the saints are all numbered and sealed and probation is closed, would you pray to stay in this world another 100 years, or 50 years, or 10 years?

What *would* you pray? To get out as quick as possible, because the reason for being here has been accomplished.

Could that be just as correct with a person that reached that point where God saw that he was ready to close his probation before the world as a whole had closed its probation? Yes friends, it could. If Hezekiah had died when God told him to set his house in order, for the time had come for him to die, Hezekiah would have been saved in the kingdom of God. Not only that, but a lot of trouble would have been saved to Judah and the kingdom.

I repeat, the great purpose in life is to develop a good character, a good name. Do you know *why* that's the great purpose? I will tell you. Heaven keeps a school, a university of the universe, and God is looking for students to enter that

higher course of education. But you must have your credits. You must pass your entrance examinations in this life. The great purpose of life is to get to the place where you can pass those examinations.

That's why we haven't time to spend with a lot of subjects that we can't take with us. That is why the Spirit of Prophecy says that we should weed out of our courses the things that students can't take to the higher school. We need all the time to spend on the things that are required for admission there.

Some people are so busy getting the things that are required for admission *here* that they altogether lose sight of the things that are required for admission *there*. Here is a person; he lives a certain length of life. And all the while, heaven is superintending his education—not merely in books but in life, for that's what life *is*. Life is the great preparatory course in the education of eternity. Finally, that individual gets to the place where God, looking upon him, says, "He's ready. I can admit him now to the higher school." God says to that man, "I'm ready now for you to close your probationary period."

I say this not thoughtlessly nor heartlessly: Whether the thing that closes that man's course is an automobile hitting him on the highway, or the germ of tuberculosis or cancer, or any one of ten thousand other things, what difference does it really make (in the great long view of eternity) if he's ready and heaven's time has come for him to close his schoolwork here? This is the vital thing to remember in all I am studying: A man may be ready *one* time and *not* ready *another* time.

I think of experiences of men in this movement. I think of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. One of the most brilliant minds this denomination ever had. What a worker he was—how much he accomplished, the books he wrote, the lectures he gave, the operations he performed, the sick people he helped, the prayers he offered that were answered, the great humanitarian work he did. There was a time when the Spirit of Prophecy said that he was a converted man. It almost seems that it would have been a wonderful thing if he could have laid down his life when he was in that condition. But he lived on and on. He was riding a bicycle at the age of 90, but not toward heaven. The last decades of his life were spent without the light and hope that this message brings to you and me.

I say that it is possible for a man to close his probation at one time and be ready to go to the school of the hereafter, but he may linger on and find himself not only *less* prepared but not prepared at *all*. He cannot pass; he's outside the gates. Oh, what a tragedy.

Somebody says, "But I wouldn't do that." Oh, you don't know what you'd do. The heart is deceitful above all things. God knows I long for the healing power of the latter rain and the loud cry, but there is something I long for 10 times more. It is the resignation and alignment of my will with God's will so that when God says it's bedtime, I will say, "All right, Father, tuck me in. Just wake me in the morning."

Don't for a minute think that this means we are not going to pray that sick people will get well. We have prayed through the years that have passed and we have seen God heal some of them. He hasn't healed them all, and I'm glad He

hasn't. I don't think it's because people haven't had faith enough or they weren't good enough, or any of those reasons. I think all those things enter in to some experiences. But God forbid that you and I should get on the judgment seat and decide what it is that's holding back the healing of this one or that one or the other one. It's not our business; we'll make poor work of it if we try.

"We no longer mark out a way nor seek to bring the Lord to our wishes. If the life of the sick can glorify Him, we pray that they may live; nevertheless, not as we will but as He will. Our faith can be just as firm, and more reliable, by committing the desire to the all-wise God, and, without feverish anxiety, in perfect confidence, trusting all to Him" *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, page 149.

On the preceding page comes this matchless sentence:

"All that can be done in praying for the sick is to earnestly importune God in their behalf, and in perfect confidence rest the matter in His hands" *Ibid*, page 148.

We are to search our hearts, of course; we are to see if there is any sin. But we are not to have the idea that if we search our hearts deep enough and repent long enough and plead hard enough, everybody will get well. We are not to have that idea at all. And we are not to have the *converse* of that—thinking that if someone *doesn't* get well it is because somebody didn't pray hard enough, or because somebody didn't search their hearts deep enough, or because somebody wasn't important enough. Some died in the days of Christ and in the days of the apostles because the Lord knew just what was best for them. It was "bedtime."

I come now to the experience of Jesus Himself.

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" Hebrews 5:7.

Jesus prayed to God to save Him from death. Was His prayer heard? The Father heard Him. There were two ways God could have answered that prayer. His prayer was to be saved from death. God could have answered that prayer by saving Him from dying. But God didn't answer His prayer that way.

There was a second way that God could answer His prayer. To let him die, but bring Him through death so that He came out living and triumphant on the resurrection morning. That's the way God answered the prayer. He was saved from death. He's not dead now. He lives forever.

This week, I have been face to face with the great enemy. I stood by the side of my dear brother down in Mississippi. As I held his hand and read the promises,

and we prayed together, something came into my soul of nearness to the eternal world more than I have felt it in a long time—perhaps ever.

I said to him Wednesday evening, as we were meditating in the twilight, “You know doctor, being with you here and looking at the things we have looked at makes it seem as if we were standing on the edge of the valley. We look out across the river, and there is the evergreen shore. There is Jesus, and there are the angels. And as sure as can be, you are right on the threshold of one of two wonderful things. Either God is going to miraculously heal you by a most outstanding miracle, or else you are going to lie down to rest in Jesus' arms and wake up in the resurrection morning, which to you will seem like just one minute from the time you go to sleep till you wake up. As I sit here with you, we're looking at those two wonderful things. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God should hear our united prayers and you would get up from this bed perfectly well? Wouldn't that be wonderful? Why, if that's the thing that's going to happen, we're right on the threshold of it—almost as if we could reach out and grasp it. If it's going to come at all, it's going to come right away.

“But if the other wonderful thing happens, then we are right on the edge of that, for you only have a little time longer here. In just a little while, you are going to be lying down in Jesus' arms, and then the next moment, as far as you are concerned, you are going to wake up and meet Jesus and the angels. Thank God we look right across the valley, right across the river, and there it is. We're going up together to the gates of the city of God.”

Friends, I think it's a wonderful hope. Don't you? When we get that far along the road of sickness, God is either going to reach down His hand and miraculously heal, or reach down His hand and smooth the pillow and say, “Good night. I'll see you in the morning.” Either way, it's wonderful.

Remember there are two ways: You can be saved from dying. You can go like Enoch and Elijah went, or you can be saved from death as Moses was, as Jesus was. You cannot have your choice; *God* has the choice.

When Paul was looking at it in Philippians, he said that if he had the choice he didn't know which he'd choose. To remain in the flesh seemed to be more needful. But oh, it would be wonderful to depart and be with Christ. To Paul, it just seemed like one minute from the time he died until Jesus would come. To depart and to be with Christ—overlooking as it were the great span of centuries which humanity goes through but which Paul knows nothing of—it's all one moment from death until the resurrection.

Oh friends, the Christian's hope is a very practical, real thing. Aren't you glad? Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory? I know that death is an enemy, but thank God it's *conquered*.

Now I ought to add this, lest we overlook something vital: There are times, even when people are perfectly prepared and ready to go, that God raises them up and extends their life for the purpose of the work they may do in His cause. It's a very natural thing for us to think that is a good reason to urge upon God, and I think it

is. I think it's the best reason in the world. But there again, we have to let the Lord decide.

For 6,000 years, God has been letting people go to rest just when they had learned something about how to work for Him. All the people who started this movement are dead and in their graves. Wouldn't their counsel be worth a lot now? Wouldn't their leadership be worth a lot? Wouldn't their service be worth a great deal? But if they were here, some of us might be standing by watching *them* instead of getting the experience ourselves. So I say again, God knows what He's about. The greatest thing that you and I can do is to have enough faith in God to believe that He knows better than we do, and to have enough love for Him to say, "Father, whatever you say is all right." That won't keep us from praying, but it will enable us to pray much more intelligently and much more effectually and effectively.

Trusting God's wisdom, we shall be restful. Trusting His love, we shall be obedient. Trusting His almighty power, we shall be delivered from fear both for ourselves and our loved ones.

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