

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, June 13, 1993, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **JOHN 14:19 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 15:26**

“Before long, the world will not see Me any more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.” (A message from Jesus, Himself.)

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (A message from His greatest apostle, St. Paul).

“I believe in the resurrection of the body.” (An affirmation from the Apostles’ Creed.)

### **DO DEAD PEOPLE LIVE AGAIN?**

When a dear friend is taken from us by death, our thoughts instinctively turn to our “Christian hope” and our belief in the resurrection of the dead. We remember our Lord’s own words to His disciples in the Upper Room on the evening before His atoning death on Calvary when He said, “Because I live, you will live also.” For the Christian, death is not the end of the road. It may be the end of the chapter, but it is not the end of the book.

But is that true? Does life continue beyond the grave, or is belief in immortality just wishful thinking on the part of religious folk? Is it true, or is it just whistling in the dark to keep your courage up?

Secular humanists, of course, would say, “Humans are simply the highest form of animal life, and like all other animals, when the life goes out of us, that’s it. There is nothing but oblivion. We are simply snuffed out like a candle flame.” It is said that Georges Clemenceau, the famous French statesman, who unfortunately was an atheist, once pointed to an open grave and muttered, “There’s all you can say about a man — a hole in the ground and a great deal of noise about nothing!”

Now of course, you cannot “prove” that there is a life beyond the grave in the same way that you can “prove” a proposition in geometry, for example. But there are certain truths we must take into consideration, truths which reveal to us that it is far more credible and intellectually respectable to believe in the after-life than to deny it.

I may never have visited a certain town, but if, at six different crossroads I see six different signposts each with the name of that town upon it, I shall be reasonably certain in my own mind that the town really exists, because there are at least six different roads leading to it. Now, I may never have been to the world beyond, but there are many signposts pointing toward that world which make it much easier for me to believe that it really exists. And we could not employ our time more profitably this morning than in the consideration of some of these

### **SIGNPOSTS TO IMMORTALITY.**

## **1. The first signpost I would call the REASONABLENESS OF THE UNIVERSE.**

Is it reasonable to suppose that a human being is not a spiritual and eternal being, and that when his body dies, that is the end of him? When that body of yours, whose chemical components — the fat and the phosphorus, the carbon and the calcium, the iron, the water and all the rest — worth about \$7.00, is placed in a casket costing \$4,000, and the whole lot lowered into a hole in the ground, or incinerated in a crematorium, is that the last word? Has the curtain been lowered at the conclusion of the final act?

For the “lower animals”, that is undoubtedly true. But the secular humanists are dead wrong in equating human animals with the lower animals. What lower animal could invent a computer, or design and construct a skyscraper? And, above all, no lower animal can lift its eyes to the heavens and worship and hold fellowship with its Creator. We believe that mankind is categorically different from the lower creation because we have been created “in the image of God”, and are, therefore, endowed with intellectual and spiritual capabilities that God denied to the lower animals.

There are those, of course, who say that the human spirit is dependent on the body and must, therefore, perish when the body dies. But what do we mean by “dependent on the body”? The unborn chick is absolutely dependent on the egg, but it is a temporary dependence only. The butterfly is absolutely dependent on the cocoon, but it is a temporary dependence only, in preparation for a future and glorious liberty. The unborn baby is absolutely dependent upon its mother’s womb, but again, it is only a temporary dependence.

Why, then, is it thought impossible that the human spirit, the real “You”, when separated from the earthly body, should not continue to exist alone? Is it not more probable that, at death, the spirit achieves a grander liberty and a fuller life?

Even in this world we encounter, everyday, certain things for which there can be no death. Three multiplied by three equals nine. From everlasting to everlasting, everywhere and always, that will live on. Even if the universe were suddenly to disintegrate, that would still be a deathless truth — that three times three is nine. Death can get no hold on a thing like a mathematical truth.

But what is a mathematical truth in comparison with a human personality? Now, suppose we drop our belief in the hereafter, what happens? We are driven to the belief that God, the eternal Architect of His universe, having crafted man with all his splendid powers of love and heroism, as the crowning product of His creation, then proceeds to throw man upon the scrap heap of death. If we reject the resurrection of the dead, then we must believe that human personalities like Johann Sebastian Bach, Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln and Connie Springmann are of no more ultimate value than the autumn leaves that fly before the wind. We are forced to believe that human souls which have been radiant with faith and love and self-sacrifice can be snuffed out forever by a microbe, or by cancer cells, or a piece of shrapnel, or a drunken driver’s twist of the wheel of an automobile. Does that really make sense?

I have crossed the Atlantic on a number of great ocean liners, and I have handled a rowboat on the lakes of Northern Ontario. I know that no one could ever make an ocean trip in

that row boat. But with the ocean liner it is different: She is a sea-going ship; she has size and tonnage and fuel that the rowboat does not need.

So one feels about the soul of man. Man's soul is too big a thing merely to ply the shallow waters of this life. Man's spirit was made and equipped to sail the sea of eternity, to do business in great waters. The reasonableness of the universe assures me of that.

**2. The next signpost I would call THE CHARACTER OF GOD.** Suppose you had a magnificent house and suppose that through the halls and up the stairs and around the rooms of that mansion played a little child — your child. Suppose that one day a fire broke out and you had to choose which you would keep — a Rembrandt you had purchased for half a million dollars — or your child. If you chose to save the Rembrandt and allow your child to perish, we would know that you were either insane or diabolically wicked.

I ask you — Is the God who revealed Himself to us in Christ either insane or wicked? Does He keep the body, and allow the spirit to perish? Does He hug the dust and throw away the soul?

Just because Jesus has shown us what God is like, we are convinced that the heart of the universe is friendly, and that the end of our existence will not be a sheer precipice, and a fall into the abyss of oblivion and annihilation. God has put in our hearts the hope of an endless future in His nearer presence. In Christ, His beloved Son, He has assured us of the heavenly mansions that await His believing people. Would God allow us to cherish such hopes and longings and then shatter them in some fiendish game He was playing with us? Do you imagine for a moment that the God Who numbers the hairs of our head, Who loves us with a love so infinite, tender and sublime, that it is quite beyond all human comprehension, is going to be defeated at the last by an incident like death?

A lady who had been a devoted Christian passed away some time ago, and at the graveside, the one who loved her better than all the world summed up one of the deepest cries of the human heart when he said, "God must not let anything happen to her!"

In India, they tell us, there are men who sit beside pools of water with piles of colored dust beside them, and so skillfully do they drop the dust upon the still surface of the water that they can actually make recognizable portraits of distinguished men and women. Then a breeze ruffles the water, and the picture disappears. Does God conduct His business like that? Does He take colored dust and drop it on life's water and produce a Moses, a John Wesley, a Jesus Christ, or your own dear mother; and then does the breeze of death disturb the water, and they disappear?

If God climbed the slopes of Calvary for us; if the bells of Heaven ring out for every sinner who receives Christ into his life; then do you suppose that God will ever allow His love to be thwarted by the incident called "death" at the end of life's little day. Folks, if you can believe that, you can believe anything!

**3. The third and final signpost which I would mention is THE RESURRECTION**

**OF CHRIST.** Claudio, a character in Shakespeare’s play, “Measure for Measure”, exclaims.

“Death is a fearful thing...  
To die and go we know not where!”

“If only someone could come back,” we say, “then I could be sure!” But Someone has come back! That is the heart of the Christian Gospel. Christ has come back! He has forever conquered death. He has not only robbed sin of its power, He has also robbed death of its sting.

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death”, exclaims St. Paul (1. Cor. 15:26), and that is exactly what our Lord accomplished by His atoning death and triumphant resurrection. Death is now a defeated foe; Christ has trampled upon it. He has stormed the gates; He has captured the Kingdom of sin and death.

For the unbeliever, death is a tragedy; for the Christian, it is simply the gateway into a richer and fuller life. Of course, “eternal” life, that rich, completely satisfying relationship with God through saving faith in Christ, is something you and I can have here and now. We don’t need to wait until death to receive it. The very moment we enter into a faith relationship with our living Savior — in that precise moment, death loses all hold upon us and we begin to experience and enjoy everlasting life as a present possession.

Nevertheless, at death the Christian enters for the first time into the full and unending blessedness of “eternal” life in heaven. Our Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it so triumphantly in answer to Question 37 which asks: “What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?” Listen to the answer which is a glorious affirmation of our faith: “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory, and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.”

D.L. Moody, the famous 19th Century Evangelist, once said to a few friends, “Some morning you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody is dead. But don’t believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I was born of the flesh in 1837; I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die; that which is born of the Spirit shall live forever!” And Moody was right. Death cannot touch the person who is united with Christ and who knows “the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). “He who believes on the Son HAS everlasting life” (John 6:47).

Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scout movement, is buried in Kenya in East Africa. On the very simple tombstone that marks his grave, there are just the words,

Robert Baden-Powell  
Chief Scout of the World

and underneath that, the dates of his birth and death. And then, below that there is carved into the stone a circle with a dot in the center of it. Every Boy Scout knows that that circle with a dot in the center is the Scout sign for “I have gone home”.

Could anything be more fittingly placed upon the gravestone of any Christian than just that? For that is what death is for a Christian man or woman — simply a quiet “going home”.

Let this glorious truth give you courage, hope and peace amid the testings of this present evil age. Let it nurture your love and devotion for the Lord Who has made our eternal welfare secure by His death and resurrection. Let the signposts which point to immortality —

The Reasonableness of the Universe,  
The Character of God, and  
The Resurrection of Christ

rekindle your faith, and nerve you for the fight; for everlasting life is the promised and glorious inheritance of every blood-bought, born again child of God. Believe that; live by it; and die by it!  
for

“No eye has seen, no ear heard, no mind has conceived,  
What God has prepared for those Who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9)

**AMEN.**