

HOW THEY STAY WITH US

J.R. Miller:

DEATH is ever bearing away the fresh and fair and beautiful ones of earthâ€”and leaving hearts bleeding, and homes desolate. Apart from the religion of Christ, there is no light in the darkness of bereavement. The best that philosophy can doâ€”is to try to forget the grief. Science can do nothing better. But the Word of God lights the lamps of true consolation, in the gloom of Christian sorrow.

In Christ, we never really lose our godly friends who pass away from us in the vanishing of death. They go from our sightâ€”but they are ours still. They were never so lovely in life, when they walked before usâ€”as they are now, when only love's eyes can see them. They live in our memory, in our very soul; and it is in transfigured beauty that they dwell with us. We do not think any more of the faults and blemishes, which we used to see in them so clearly, when they were with us. Death's hand has swept all these away! At the same time every lovely feature in them shines out now, like a star in the sky at night, and all the good things they ever did are remembered, and appear radiant as angel ministries. Such strange power has love, under the quickening touch of death's hand.

There is another way in which our beloved ones stay with us after they have vanished from sight in death's mists. Everything they have touched, becomes in a certain sense, sacramental. Their names are written everywhere. They have left part of themselves, as it were, on each familiar thing or scene with which in life they were associated. Wherever we move we are reminded of them. Here is a path where their feet walked. Here is a tree under which they sat. Here is a book they read, with the pencil marks indicating the thoughts that pleased them. Here is a garment their hands made, or a picture they painted, or some bit of work they did. About the house, everything is sacred, because of the memories it awakens.

Our friends are not altogether gone from usâ€”who are brought back so vividly to our memory, by the things and the places amid which they once walked.

Nor do we lose altogether the influence upon us, of those who have passed from us. True, we hear no more the whisper of warning, the loving counsel, the chiding when we have done wrong, the urgent, inspiriting word when our courage has failed us, the commendation when we have done well. Yet, in a sense, the influence on us of our friends who have gone, is still very potent. Many a son has been saved from ruinâ€”by the memory of a mother's pale dying face, speaking without wordsâ€”its loving entreaty and its earnest warning.

Many people are urged to high endeavors and to noble attainments and achievements, by the thoughts of their dear godly ones dwelling deep in the holy peace and joy of God. A mother who for a year had had a godly child in heaven, said that she had never known such a year of calm, restful peace. She believed in the actual existence of her darling in the blessedness of heaven, and the realizing of this had kept her own heart in quiet confidence, amid all life's cares and trials. Even her sorrow she had forgotten; it had been swallowed up, like the night's darkness in the morning's gloryâ€”by the triumphant assurance that her darling child was living with Christ.

There is yet another sense in which our departed Christian friends stay with us after they have vanished from earth. We know that they are still living, that they still remember us and still love usâ€”though we are in a sense separated from them. Love is stronger than death; and love binds us and them in close and holy bondsâ€”even though they have passed over the valley of the shadow of deathâ€”and we yet stay on this side. Through the longest years, this tie is not destroyed. We do not forget our Christian friendsâ€”and they do not forget us. Thus we have them still, and never quite lose them in the years that we have to walk without them. Then, by and by, we shall have them again in blessed reality, when death touches us in turnâ€”and we pass over into the same glorious joy in which they are dwelling.

A large part of the blessed hope of heaven is its reunions. The Bible gives us many glimpses of the glory and beauty of the glorious home which awaits us. We are told of streets of gold, of gates of pearl, of a river of the water of life, of a crystal seaâ€”all that earth can find of splendorâ€”is brought into the picture to heighten our conception of the glories of heaven. But that which makes heaven dear to those who have loved ones there, is not so much the promise of all this splendor of beautyâ€”as the hope of reuniting with the dear friends who are in the midst of all this incomparable beauty.

Do we get the most and the best possible in our bereavements, from the truths which Christ brings to us? Does not our faith's vision often become so dim with our tears, that we lose sight altogether of the immortality into which our Christian dead have entered? We say we believe in the endless life; but too often it is such a

HOW THEY STAY WITH US

shadowy, nebulous thought, which we have of it that no comfort comes to us from it! We really mourn our departed friends as lostâ€”while we go on saying in our creed, "I believe in the life everlasting." Yet we are robbing our own hearts of the comforts that God has provided, when we do not take to ourselves the blessed hopes and consolations of our Christian faith. We really hold no living friends with such a sure claspâ€”as that which makes our sainted ones ours. There are many ways of losing living friends; but those who have passed into God's keeping are forever beyond the possibility of being lost to us.