

## Facts About Funeral Services

John 3:3, 7 & 12: 'Jesus said, "I solemnly (seriously) tell you, that unless a person is born-again from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God ... Do not be surprised at My telling you, you must all be born-again ... If I tell you of things that happen right here on the earth and yet none of you believes Me, how can you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"

Eternal life is promised to all who choose to believe and accept Jesus as their Saviour. Jesus made it very clear, we have to be born-again if we want to go to heaven. He strengthened that by adding we should not be surprised at being told we must be born-again, but He also knew many people would not believe Him. The Lord and the Bride; that is whole true genuine Holy Spirit-filled Christian world are calling out to every person on earth to come to Jesus. 'The Holy Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" Let those who are listening say, "Come!" Let everyone who is thirsty and whoever desires to do it, let them come, take, and drink the water of Life freely' (Revelation 22:17). 'There is salvation through no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). For us to make it into heaven we must be walking with God at the time of our death. If we accept Jesus then walk away from Him, then we can lose the gift of eternal life and end up lost. 'Yet now has Jesus the Messiah reconciled you to God the Father in the body of His flesh through death, in order to present you holy and blameless in the Father's presence. He will do this provided that you continue to stay in the faith in Jesus, well-grounded and steadfast, not moving away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard and which has been preached to every person under heaven' (Colossians 1:22 & 23).

Every adult person who has ever lived and died will be raised from their natural death to be judged. Some will go to heaven and receive their rewards for righteous living and righteous works, and many will go to the lake of fire as their judgement. 'Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (Daniel 12:2). God writes down everything every person has done while on earth, whether good or bad, and on Judgement Day He will decide who goes to heaven and who goes to the lake of fire, according to what they have done. 'I (John) saw the dead, the great and the small standing before the (Great White) Throne of Judgement, and the books were opened. Then another book was opened which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what they had done according to what was written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Hades and death were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was hurled into the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:12 to 15). 'We must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Jesus, so that each one may receive his reward according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil' (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The above verses reveal to us, death is not the end of people – it is just a stepping stone, and God makes it very clear, we have to be faithfully walking with Him at the time of our death if we want to go to heaven. The only way we can be presented to God as righteous believers is to stay firmly in relationship with Jesus. 'Keep yourselves in the love of God; wait patiently for the mercy of our Lord Jesus the Messiah Who will bring you to eternal life. Show mercy to those who doubt. Strive to save others, snatching them out of the lake of fire. Now to Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling or falling, to present you blameless and faultless before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy' (Jude 1:21 to 24). We have to be righteous not religious to get to heaven, and we can only become righteous by living in the grace of God. Merely believing in God is not enough to get into heaven. Being a 'nice' or 'good' person is not enough. Tragically, many lovely people will end up in hell, because no matter how nice, kind and gentle natured they are, if they refuse to be saved God's way, then they will not be saved at all. We all have to be born-again, obey God and walk with Him daily in all sincerity to get to heaven. To refuse to be born-again is disobedience to a direct instruction given very clearly by Jesus Himself. We born-again believers must strive to save others by snatching them out of the eternal fire, and the only way to do that is by telling people the truth of the Gospel.

When Jesus was baptised the heavens were opened (Matthew 3:16; Acts 7:56). When Jesus was resurrected the tombs of the righteous were opened. 'The tombs were opened and many bodies of the Godly who had fallen asleep in death were raised to life, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they went into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many people' (Matthew 27:52 & 53). That was when heaven began to receive righteous people. The unrighteous remained in Hades. The second we die our spirit leaves the body of flesh. The righteous will immediately go to heaven and Jesus will receive their spirit; 'While they were stoning Stephen he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"' (Acts 7:59). If they are non-believers and have rejected the notion of being born-again they go to hell, also called Hades, to await

Judgement Day. Then the unsaved, unrighteous will be raised to be judged and condemned. 'He has set a day when He will judge the world righteously by a Man (Jesus) Whom He has appointed, and God has made this evident to everyone by raising Jesus from the dead' (Acts 17:31).

That brings us to the basis for this Bible study. We need to make it clear that having a so-called Christian burial will not usher anyone into heaven. We all have to be born-again before we die. Once we are dead it is too late. The window of opportunity to seek salvation is gone forever. Praying for the dead is useless. By the time a funeral is held, the person's eternal fate is already decided. They decided their own fate by accepting or rejecting Jesus as their Saviour. The ritual of a Christian funeral held in a Christian church, no matter how elaborate, no matter what the minister says, will not send the deceased person to heaven if they have never been born-again. It doesn't matter how nice, good or kind the person was or how much they gave to charity, if they were not born-again and walked with God in full sincerity while they were on earth, all those good things will be lost when the person dies. The Bible says the good deeds will be burned up. The truth of this has to be spoken out loud and clear. If you are counting on a religious funeral to send you off to the heavenlies after death, then you will be terribly, tragically and eternally disappointed. No funeral can possibly save the soul, no matter what religion it is. God the Father Himself chose the only way of salvation for mankind. We must do it His way, and His way is through Jesus. If we try to choose any other way of salvation, God says it will not work. The one and only way for anybody to get to heaven after death is to accept Jesus as our personal Saviour while we are alive on earth. A funeral cannot save the soul of any person. By the time the funeral takes place it is already too late.

There is great hypocrisy of speech during 'Christian' funerals for people who are not saved. The ministers say lovely things about the deceased person they have never met. There are people who disliked the deceased person yet attend a funeral to 'pay their last respects' when previously, there was no respect. The minister, who is in a position where he should know the Gospel and should know the unsaved do not go to heaven, tell the family of the deceased, that the deceased person is going to heaven, and that the surviving family members will be with their loved ones when they eventually die. That is hypocrisy and lies and the ministers of religion know it. The ministers know the Gospel message, but refuse to tell people. It is time for ministers in Christian churches to tell people at funerals the truth; that it is likely their loved one is not in heaven unless they were born-again and showed their faith and their light while they were alive. Funerals are a perfect opportunity for ministers to lovingly show the bereaved the way to heaven, not pretend all people will all go there and say nothing about the severe judgement of God. Woe to those ministers. Jesus said, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness is more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:20). "For although they hold a form of religion, they deny the power of God. Avoid such people" (2 Timothy 3:5). Jesus said, "Woe to you Pharisees (ministers of religion), you hypocrites! For you shut the Kingdom of heaven in men's faces; for you neither enter yourselves, nor do you allow those who are about to go in, to enter" (Matthew 23:14). The ministers of religion who refuse to tell mourners the full Gospel are like the Pharisees who shut the doors of heaven to the unsaved.

Having empty religion that denies the power of God and a pretended piety cannot save anyone ... neither can having a religious ceremony save the soul of the deceased. The scriptures are very clear ... we cannot get to heaven unless we obey the Gospel which is the will of God, we must repent, be baptised in water, be baptised in the Holy Spirit as an act of obedience and walk with Jesus every day of our lives without slipping back into sin. Unless a person receives Jesus before their death they are a lost soul and their fate is sealed before their funeral, so a fancy service, even an elaborate state funeral for a well known person cannot usher them into the Kingdom of God. That is the harsh reality. We must 'See that you do not reject Him or refuse to listen to and obey Him Who is speaking to you now. For if the Israelites did not escape when they refused to listen to Him Who warned them here on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject and ignore Him Who cautions us from heaven?' (Hebrews 12:25).

It is a fallacy, a foolish erroneous belief to think it is okay to live a life of rebellion against God on earth, then expect to get to heaven just because one has a so-called Christian funeral service. Most certainly the deceased have to be buried, and the mourners and family members need to be able to grieve, but the funeral service is an earthly event, not a heavenly one. Church ministers should use the occasion of a funeral to tell the truth to the grieving family and friends, share the full Gospel message as outlined by Jesus, and invite them to accept Him as their Saviour. Ministers should never tell people they will meet their loved ones in heaven when they are possibly lost for eternity. That is terribly misleading. The Bible mentions church ministers who behave like that. 'They profess to know God but deny Him by what they do; they are unbelieving, disobedient, rebellious and are unfit for any good work' (Titus 1:16).

This is a true story to give an example of what we are saying. Here in Australia like in other countries, we unfortunately have several motorcycle gangs that are filled with evil wickedness and are the epitome of what God calls loathsome. 'A wicked man is loathsome and he brings shame' (Proverbs 13:5). During a murderous shoot-out between rival gangs, one gang member was shot and died there in the street with his gun still in his hand. He was a murderer who had died as he lived – violently. The deceased gang member had an elaborate Christian funeral. Dozens of gang members attended. His expensive coffin was taken to the church service and then to the cemetery on a sidecar. The other gang members put on an innocent stance as they mourned their evil comrade and gave him a guard of honour. During the service the church minister spoke of that man being 'at peace' and his soul was 'now at rest'. The church minister knew what kind of man the gang member was; he knew the man died in his sin; he knew he could not possibly be with God. Not once did he use that perfect opportunity to tell the other gang members the Gospel, or how they could be saved. Gang members spoke to the dead man at the funeral and told him they would see him 'on the other side'. If the other gang members do not turn from their wickedness and repent, they may see him on the 'other side' but they will be in eternal torment with him – not in rest or peace. Most certainly God is our Judge, but if we read what the Bible says and pay attention, we would know that evil man's convoluted funeral could never usher him into heaven, but there is hope for those who are still living – as long as they repent and accept Jesus as their Saviour.

What kind of funeral is acceptable to God? We need to search the scriptures to find that answer, but to put it very briefly; burial in the ground, in caves or tombs is God's preferred way for us to deal with the dead. Nothing was ever buried with the bodies. Prayers were said for the surviving families to help with their grieving but not for the dead. Scriptures were read and joyful music was played to celebrate the life of the person now gone. Sometimes, once a body had decomposed to a skeletal state, the bones were removed from the ground and placed in a permanent stone box called an ossuary and re-interred in a tomb. Many tombs containing ossuaries have been unearthed in Israel. Coffins were not used in ancient days, and whether or not coffins are used today is not relevant. Many Jewish people opt for a coffin without a complete base. Flowers are inappropriate for a Jewish funeral. 'Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah to the east of Mamre, that is Hebron in the land of Canaan (Israel) (Genesis 23:19). 'Jesus approached the tomb. It was a cave; a hole hewn in the rock, and a boulder lay against the entrance' (John 11:38). King David was buried in a field, in the area that is now a cemetery in the City of David (Jerusalem) (1 Kings 2:10). The immediate blood-related family would wash the body. 'The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the priests and say to them that none of them shall defile himself for the dead among his people by touching the dead or assisting in preparing it for burial, except for his blood family, for his mother, father, son, daughter, brother or sister"' (Leviticus 21:1 to 3). The deceased would be wrapped in wide fine linen bandages or a shroud – always with a separate cloth around the head. 'Out walked Lazarus, the man who had been dead, his hands and feet wrapped in burial cloths, linen strips, and with a cloth around his face' (John 11:44). 'The burial cloth which had been around Jesus' head, was not lying with the other linen cloths, but was rolled up in a place by itself' (John 20:7). 'The young men arose, wrapped up the body, carried it out and buried it (Acts 5:6). The deceased would be carried on a litter – something like a stretcher. The deceased would be removed from the litter and buried face up. People would be left alone to mourn for thirty days before getting on with life. 'When the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they wept for him thirty days' (Num 20:29). 'The Israelites wept for Moses thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended (Deuteronomy 34:8). We can see how the Lord has gently given us guidelines to follow in regards to dealing with our deceased loved ones. We are to treat the deceased with respect, but not worship them. People who know God and respect His opinions will follow His guidelines.

There are many pagan rituals that have come over into our so-called Christian burial service. Things like (1) burying jewellery, clothing, gifts or other things with the deceased. The pagans put things with their dead so they could take the items into the 'afterlife'. Beautiful jewellery in particular was given to the dead in the belief it would awaken the deceased's sense of sight. (2) Giving flowers is pagan. It was thought the seeds within the flowers would bring the person's spirit back for a rebirth. The scent of flowers were believed to awaken the deceased's sense of smell in the afterlife. (3) The noisy wake, ululating and crying out loudly to bewail the dead are all pagan. In some countries the women work themselves up into a demonic frenzy. They did it to supposedly chase the evil spirits away so the dead could rise quickly to heaven without confronting evil – except that they would probably not be rising to heaven but descending into hell. (4) The belief that the service will send all deceased off to heaven is pagan. They believed their ceremony would usher the dead into the afterlife. (5) Just as the dead have lovely things said about them and a false respect is paid to them, so the pagans worshipped their dead – once they were dead, even if they were hated in life. (6) Following a hearse with lights on also originated in pagan times. The dead were carried through the streets while mourners carried burning torches. The lights were supposed to show the spirit of the dead the way to go. (7)

Prayers for the dead is pagan and very unholy. It originated in the Babylonian cult. (8) In modern funerals the mourners sometimes actually speak to the dead from the pulpit as though they were there at their own funeral service. Scripturally, that is utterly abhorrent to God. We must never speak to the dead ... ever. Not only is it pagan and evil in the sight of God, it is pointless because the person is not there anyway. They cannot hear what is being said. 'For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing' (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Either they are free in heaven, or languishing in hell, but they cannot see or hear what is going on. (9) Bell tolls come from an ancient ritual to scare evil spirits away from the ceremony. (10) A musical instrument similar to bagpipes were invented by the Persians and their doleful sound were used in their funeral rituals to help the mourning process. The Scots have taken on that role and now bagpipes are played at funerals the world over. Loud music was played in pagan burials to awaken the deceased's sense of hearing. (11) The feast after the ceremony comes from the ritual of offering food to the deceased to carry them into the afterlife and would be shared with the mourners. Food was often placed inside burial chambers to awaken the deceased's sense of taste. (12) Wearing dark clothes and veils originated in pagan times. (13) Ribbons were to ward off bad luck and are now usually tied around flowers. (14) Money was given to assist the dead to the afterlife – now it goes to charity or is to pay for the funeral itself. (15) Giving gifts originated so the spirits could receive a gift to take to the afterlife. (16) Embalming began thousands of years ago and still continues today. The massage and touching of the dead was believed to awaken the deceased's sense of touch.

Different cultures have different ways of dealing with the deceased. Cultures where the people do not know God treat their dead very differently. Apart from the usual burial sites in the earth, caves, tombs or mausoleums, in some countries burial at sea is commonplace, others feed their dead to the sharks or to birds; some are left in forests; some are cremated. Closer to the North Pole, people are sometimes buried in the ice or snow and are occasionally devoured by hungry polar bears. Sometimes there is no funeral, such as when a person donates their body to science. A recent form of burial is a promession burial, where the deceased's remains are freeze dried in liquid nitrogen, reducing the content to approximately 33% of its former volume, causing the remains become so brittle it is able to be shattered into powder by vibration and buried in a very shallow grave. Some cultures place the bodies in trees for the birds to devour, believing the flight of the birds help the deceased into the afterlife, but scripturally, only the wicked and cursed were hung or put in trees and then eaten by birds or beasts (or fed to sharks). 'It is written: Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' (Galatians 3:13). 'The dead bodies of this people will be meat for the fowls of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away' (Jeremiah 7:33). 'The rest (of the wicked) were killed with the Sword that issues from the mouth of Him Who is on the horse, and the birds were filled with their flesh' (Revelation 19:21). Feeding the dead to birds or animals is clearly not God's preferred way to deal with the deceased.

According to the Bible, only wicked people were cremated and Judaism forbids cremation according to Jewish law. God's people were to be buried. Cremation is a very ancient practice. 'He who worships idols shall be killed and his body burned with fire, because he has sinned and he has done a shameful and wicked thing ... All Israel stoned him and those with him with stones, and afterward burned their bodies with fire (Joshua 7:15 & 25). Cremation does not release the spirit from its earthly existence; the second a person dies their spirit leaves the body. Hindus believe the spirit eventually goes to 'paradise' led by two dark dogs. They are wrong. Only those who accept Jesus as their Saviour go to paradise. The two dark dogs are evil spirits taking the Hindus to hell. The spirit does not linger if the body is kept intact, as they believe. The fire is not a god and the burnt offering of the body does not please God the Father in any way; in fact He hates it. 'They have built the high places (pyres) to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire in honour of Molech, the god of fire, which I (the Lord) did not command, nor did it come into My mind' (Jeremiah 7:31). Smashing the skull during cremation does not release the spirit either. Offering food to the dead is pointless and rather foolish. Nobody sings to the dead; nymphs do not dance for them and they will never be reborn into royalty. Prolonged mourning cannot stop the spirit leaving the body. The Hindus, unless they accept Jesus, will go to hell where they will experience terror and pain – the very thing they fear most. The Ganges River cannot erase sin. Only accepting Jesus can erase sin. The Roman culture accepted cremation as the norm. They once had professional mourners, masks that depicted dead ancestors, public processions, mime, dance, feasting, and public holidays were often to commemorate the dead. Roman cremations were always held on the outskirts of their cities to prevent houses being accidentally burned down. Romans often hewed niches in rocks, often underneath their houses or in the walls, for the ashes of the dead to be kept. Vikings were often cremated in their longships.

Some cultures built great monuments for the dead like ancient Egypt did. They worshipped the Pharaohs, the sun god and many other gods, but the Lord considers that behaviour extremely evil. 'I (God the Father)

will destroy your high places (altars where they worshipped idols), and cut down your sun-images, and throw your dead bodies upon the smashed idols, and My soul shall abhor you' (Leviticus 26:30). Other cultures cut themselves or shaved their heads, believing it would somehow help the dead into the afterlife, but God hates that too. 'You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead' (Leviticus 19:28). 'You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your heads for the dead' (Deuteronomy 14:1). We are not to speak to the dead, even at their funeral. Doing that was one reason why the Lord slew Saul. 'So Saul died for his trespass against the Lord ... for his unfaithfulness in not keeping God's word, and also for consulting a spirit of the dead' (1 Chronicles 10:13). 'When people say to you, "Consult mediums and wizards who chirp and mutter", should not people seek their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?' (Isaiah 8:19). Reincarnation does not exist. Each person lives on earth only once and then dies and is judged. 'It is appointed for all people once to die, and after that the judgment' (Hebrews 9:27). No human ever comes back a second time as another person and especially not as insects, elephants or any other such thing. Humans were made in the image of God – animals were not. Humans had the breath of God breathed into them and they became a living soul – animals did not. It is an insult to God to believe in reincarnation. Every single person has the Spirit of God enter them when they are in the womb. When that person dies at whatever age, the Spirit goes back to God's care whether in heaven or hell, but never back to earth. We must establish a very important fact; the minute a person dies, they go to heaven or hell. They do not roam around the earth. Ghosts are not the souls of deceased people – they are evil spirits that have come out of dead people. A righteous person goes straight to be with the Lord and does not roam around on earth. If a person is a non-believer and has an evil spirit, when the person dies the evil spirit leaves the deceased body and roams around looking for another body to live in. 'When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, it roams through dry places in search of rest' (Matthew 12:43). When people believe they 'feel' the 'presence' of the deceased, all they have felt is the evil spirit that used to control the deceased person and possibly succeeded in destroying their life. When people think they have seen a ghost they have actually seen an evil spirit.

Adults who have consciously rejected God will be confronted by Him on Judgement Day and go to a lost eternity. Adults who have accepted and believe in God are judged by Him while on earth and are not confronted by God in judgement, but will stand before Him to receive their rewards. 'He who believes in Him is not judged; but he who does not believe is judged already because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God' (John 3:18). Dealing with the loss of children is less complicated. Jesus said the Kingdom of God belongs to children. 'Jesus called the parents to Him saying, "Allow the little children to come to Me and do not hinder them, for to such as these belongs the Kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16). The age of accountability differs from person to person according to how much they have been taught as children, but on average, most teenagers and all young children go to be with the Lord the moment they die. When King David's baby died he went straight to heaven. 'Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me' (2 Samuel 12:23). People have to deliberately reject God before He rejects them, and children do not know enough to be able to consciously reject God.

Every person who has ever lived will be resurrected to life again on Judgement Day, regardless of what has happened to their body of flesh and bones. The wicked will be resurrected to shame and eternal destruction (Daniel 12:2). Even if people have been cremated or lost at sea, all genuine believers will have a new and resurrected body to live in for eternity. 'So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body will decay, but the body that is resurrected is immortal. It is sown (buried) a natural body; it is raised a Spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a Spiritual body ... For the trumpet (shofar) will sound and we will be raised immortal; we will be changed' (1 Corinthians 15:42, 43 & 52).

Amen and God bless you.

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