



Jeff Sweeten

# *Thus Saith the Lord*

## **FUNERALS**

By Jeff Sweeten

I guess I'm getting old. Things that I could "tough up" and deal with in my younger days are now a source of somberness, seriousness and, sometimes, tears. Funerals hit me that way now-adays. This attitude did not arise instantaneously but, instead, has slowly developed over many years of preaching funerals; it has to do with the purpose of a funeral.

It is certainly the case that treating the dead with respect is as old as dirt. When the Outlaw Josey Wales, in defense to his willingness to ride away from dead bodies unattended, stated, "Buzzards gotta eat, same as worms," the script writers' psychological shock-and-awe tactic stuck home!

As far back as Abraham, the respectful treatment of the dead was an important event. So, he stated: "Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" (Genesis 23:4). Joseph wanted his embalmed body buried in Machpelah and took an oath from his kinfolk to take "him" to the Promised Land (Genesis 50:24-26). Even abused bodies are still due the common "respect for the dead" and compelled men to risk life and limb to recover Saul and his son's bodies for "proper" handling (cremation, in this case, cf. 1 Samuel 31:11-13). Obviously, all the preparations made for Jesus's body was a gesture of pure respect (John 19:38-42).

However, the funeral services that facilitate closure for people is quite a different matter. The person in state has passed on "and as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27); the actual passed-on-person is not really there for the ceremony. As one preacher quipped, "The shell is all that remains; the nut is gone." So, the eulogy, obituary, prayers, songs, etc. are for those who remain. This is where my emotions get the better of me.

You see, I am not concerned for the one who lies in state. Their fate is sealed; they will be judged by a God who is just and merciful to an infinite degree (2 Corinthians 5:10). What tugs at my heart strings is the crowd to whom I speak and for whom I pray. These are the precious souls who still have opportunity, they still have a choice to make in their life. I never wish to be harsh or abrupt with those who are mourning the loss of a loved one but, frankly, I would be remiss if I did not remind them that they, too, will come to this "untimely" end (since, at death, time is no more). And, where you spend eternity is summed up by this point: "after this the judgment."

I often look on with anxiety, as mourners grope for that elusive comfort, unaware. "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). A funeral service is a reminder: "Prepare to meet your God" (Amos 4:12). Are you ready?

*Thus Saith the Lord*  
is presented by the

## **Park Heights Church of Christ**

1300 E. Boynton St.  
Hamilton  
254-386-3953

### **Schedule of Services**

#### **SUNDAY**

9:30 a.m. Bible Class  
10:25 a.m. Morning Worship  
1:30 p.m. Afternoon Worship

#### **WEDNESDAY**

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Please call or email if you  
have a question or comment  
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