



THE CERTAINTIES OF DEATH

It has been said that the only certainties in life are death and taxes! The Bible agrees that, although pretty much everything else in life is uncertain, death isn't. But it's amazing how today's views of death are such a mixture of the pagan, superstitious and sentimental. They're full of wishful thinking, unfounded hopes, and there's no certainty about what will happen when we die. This is where the Bible is different.

Let me stress that the things I'm going to say here are true for the Christian. If you're not a Christian, there's another set of certainties that you would be wise to consider. But for now our subject is the certainties of death for the believer.

Let's start with the certainty of death itself. No one will argue with this. Our experience proves it. We will all die. But why? Basically the Bible gives two answers:
'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). We've all sinned, so we all die.
'It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement' (Hebrews 9:27). The word 'appointed' is interesting. We're all familiar with the concept of appointments—with the doctor, or dentist, etc. Sometimes circumstances make it necessary for us to cancel the appointment, but we can't cancel the appointment we have to die. God made that one, and when he calls we go.

So what happens when a Christian dies? These certainties kick into operation:

'Today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43).

This is a promise Jesus made to a man on the point of death. And it's a promise every believer regards as precious. The process of dying can be difficult for the child of God, but not death itself. Death means being with the Lord. Vavasor Powell, the Welsh Puritan, said, 'The fear of death is engrafted in the common nature of all men, but faith works it out of Christians.'

All this means that for the believer, death is not some terrifying unknown. We know

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more about what will happen to us when we die than we do about what will happen to us next year! Matthew Henry said, 'It will be like putting our clothes off to be mended and pressed, ready for the great coronation day.' That's a certainty.

Once, the wife of a Christian died, and friends came to express their sympathy. One said, 'I'm sorry you lost your wife.' The grieving Christian replied, 'I haven't lost her. I know exactly where she is and one day I will join her.' It's only grace that can give a man such confidence in the face of death.

'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1).

Here's another certainty. God has said that no one who sins in any way shall enter into heaven, so how can anyone get there? Sin keeps us out. So our sin must be dealt with.

That's what the cross is about. Our sin,

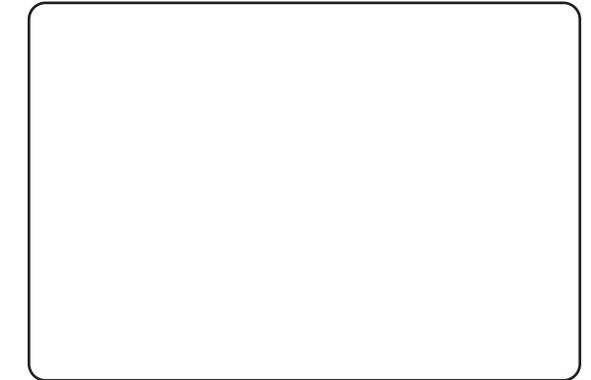
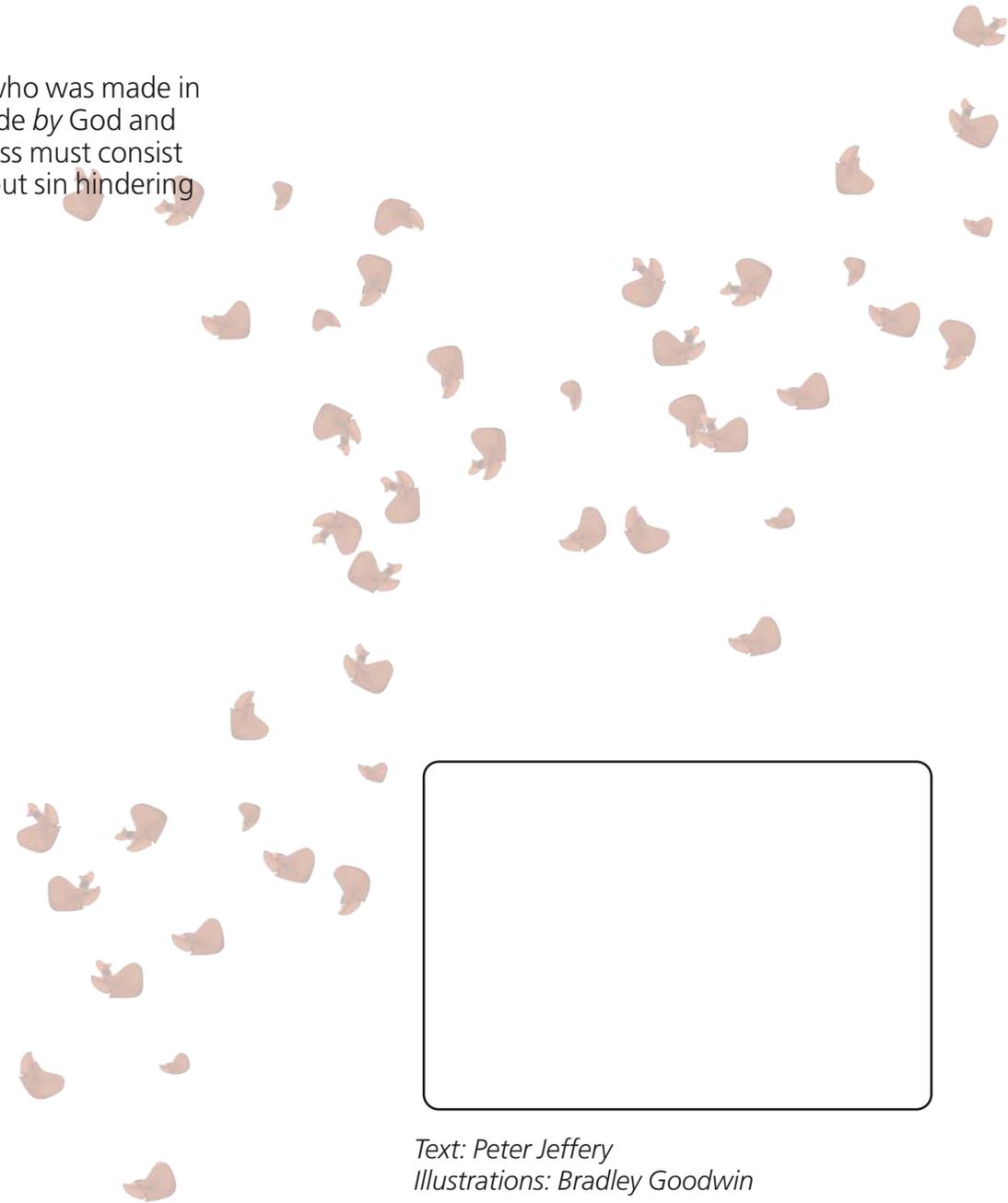
guilt and punishment are taken by Jesus. He dies in our place, as our substitute. When we become Christians, God credits to us the righteousness of Jesus. We become acceptable to God because of the Saviour. That's salvation. It's what the Bible calls 'justification'—this is the exact opposite of condemnation. The Christian is qualified for heaven the moment he or she is justified. So at death, Christians do not go floating around in some mythical purgatory but they are welcomed home to heaven. That's a certainty.

'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

What an amazing statement this is! Seeing Jesus! After days of suffering in a hospital bed, now face to face with Jesus. Whatever the circumstances of life, this isn't a tragic disaster or some terrible experience—this is glory!

Heaven is the eternal dwelling place of all those who have been born again. It's a place where there is no sin, no pain, no suffering, because there the rule of God's righteousness is complete and unchallenged. There we shall be free from the corruption of human nature. There we shall see Jesus face to face and be like him—not equal to him, but like him in that sin will not dominate us. Everlasting life is everlasting happiness without the slightest shadow or blemish to it. And

for a being like man, who was made in the *image* of God, made *by* God and *for* God, such happiness must consist in *knowing* God without sin hindering this in any way.



Text: Peter Jeffery
Illustrations: Bradley Goodwin

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