

NORTHEAST HOUSTON COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sermon: Cremation vs. Burial
Scripture Text: Genesis 3:19
01/25/2015

Genesis 3:19 (NKJV) ¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.” (PS 104:29, PS 103:14)

“Until God opens the next door, praise Him in the hallway.

At the beginning of December 2014, " The question was asked to me , "Pastor if our bodies are buried and turned to dust, will we be able to recognize our loved ones?" I was grateful for the question because for a few weeks prior I had been thinking about a message concerning the topic of cremation but was apprehensive about preaching on the subject.

The question encouraged me to boldly address the subject because others may be wondering whether cremation over burial was a sin or affected their resurrection.

I sometimes have to be reminded that I am called to teach God's word whether I am comfortable with the subject or not. I have to teach it as best I can even if it may seem to be controversial.

I have been further prompted to address this subject by my recent attempts to put together a family tree. As I search for birth and death records I came to the sober realization that I have been living longer than my father, aunts and uncles (save one by 3 years), and most of my cousins.

Death cannot be ignored and the bible says that after death comes the judgments. The world says that after death comes the funeral. Many of us experienced the passing of a loved one to be followed by a funeral service where the body is viewed and then taken to a cemetery to be interned there. That has become our traditional manner.

Many are torn as to burying their loved ones in a traditional manner or to consider cremation of their loved ones, mainly due to the cost of the whole funeral process.

This discussion may be more difficult in Christian families. I ask you to bear with me as I try, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to address this topic.

In the handling of dealing with a deceased loved one, many of our decisions are guided by tradition or what we think tradition is. Many Christians feel that all Christians should be buried because Christ was.

Our focus passage can lend support to those that believe a person should be buried into the ground.

V19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground,

It is understandable for one to think that when dead we should return to the "ground". Then there are the multiple references to "the grave", which we view as a hole in the ground.

In the 1870s, the Anglican [Bishop of London](#) stated that the practice of cremation would "undermine the faith of mankind in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and so bring about a most disastrous social revolution."^[84] In *The Lutheran Pastor*, George Henry Gerberding stated:

"As to cremation, This is not a Biblical or Christian mode of disposing of the dead. The Old and New Testament agree and take for granted that as the body was taken originally from the earth, so it is to return to the earth again. Burial is the natural and Christian mode. There is a beautiful symbolism in it.

The whole terminology of eschatology presupposes it. Cremation is purely heathenish. It was the practice among the Greeks and Romans. The mass of the Hindus thus dispose of their dead. It is dishonoring to the body, intended for a temple of the Holy Ghost and to bear the image of God. It is an insidious denial of the doctrine of the resurrection."

The above statement sort of encapsulates the typical thinking that has lasted even to this day among some religions.

As always, we must seek our final answers from the Holy Scriptures.

What does the Bible say about cremation?

Note: You can't find 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' in the Bible because it isn't there! The phrase comes from the funeral service in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and it is based on Genesis 3:19 our focus passage.

https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/book_of_common_prayer.pdf, Page 485

This phrase is one of those that has been used so much by ministers that everyone assumes it's in the Bible.

Nowhere in the Bible does it condemn cremation nor does it command that a person be buried. Burials were performed out of custom and tradition as it is done today.

The Old Testament speaks of people being burned to death ([1 Kings 16:18](#); [2 Kings 21:6](#)) and of human bones being burned ([2 Kings 23:16-20](#)), but these are not examples of cremation. It is interesting to note that in [2 Kings 23:16-20](#), burning human bones on an altar desecrated the altar. At the same time, the Old Testament law nowhere commands that a deceased human body not be burned, nor does it attach any curse or judgment on someone who is cremated.

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But also consider that in the Old Testament Saul and his sons were cremated as was Achan and his family, though for sin.

Let's look at the Christ like concern.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NKJV) ³ *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,* ⁴ ***and that He was buried,*** *and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,*

Was Christ buried as we are today? I think the Bible said that He was laid (buried) in a tomb. An expensive one that most people could not afford.

The **Catacombs of Rome** ([Italian](#): *Catacombe di Roma*) are ancient [catacombs](#), underground burial places under [Rome, Italy](#), of which there are at least forty, some discovered only in recent decades. Though most famous for [Christian](#) burials, either in separate catacombs or mixed together, they began in the 2nd century AD, ^[1] mainly as a response to overcrowding and shortage of land.

Second century Christians were not always buried in the ground but in caves often sharing the space. Like Lazarus.

In New Orleans and in Galveston people are buried above the ground because of sea level. This is to dispel the spiritual imperative of being buried IN the ground.

Will our body being burned (cremated) affect our resurrection?

The simple answer is no, not in the least.

Remember that at the Rapture we will be raised in a "Spiritual" body, an incorruptible body, a body like Christ's. What need will we have for the dust we once were?

Think for a moment about all those Christians in the first century that were burned alive for the amusement of Emperors like Nero and Dalmatian.

Think of all those Christians who were falsely accused, by the "church" of hearsay and were burned alive. People like: William Tyndale 1484–1496 - For translating the bible into English.
http://kotisatama.net/files/kotisatama/Tekstit_ja_kirjat/foxe.pdf page 133

Bloody Mary Queen of England

As the fourth crowned monarch of the [Tudor dynasty](#), Mary is remembered for her restoration of Roman Catholicism after the short-lived Protestant reign of her half-brother. During her five-year reign, she had **over 280 religious dissenters** [burned at the stake](#) in the [Marian persecutions](#). Her re-establishment of Roman Catholicism was reversed after her death in 1558 by her younger half-sister and successor [Elizabeth I](#), daughter of Henry and [Anne Boleyn](#).

In 1665, in London England a charming but dark rhyme was often heard.

"Ring-a-ring of roses / A pocketful of posies / At-choo at-choo! / We all fall down!" This was the result of the "Bubonic Plague" or the "Black Death". People died at a rate too fast that the undertakers and burials could not keep up with it. Therefore, bodies were collected to be piled up and burned in order to stop the spreading of the plague. Among those bodies there were no doubt Christians.

During the Middle Ages, throughout parts of Europe, cremation was forbidden by law, and even punishable by death if combined with [Heathen](#) rites.[6] Cremation was sometimes used by authorities as part of punishment for heretics, and this did not only include burning at the stake. For example, the body of [John Wycliff](#) was exhumed years after his death and cremated, with the ashes thrown in a river,[7] explicitly as a posthumous punishment for his denial of the [Roman Catholic](#) doctrine of [transubstantiation](#).[8]

On the other hand, mass cremations were often performed out of fear[9] of contagious diseases, such as after a battle, pestilence, or famine.
http://crematorium.eu/history_of_cremation.html

Would Christ not raise his followers among all these instances to a new spiritual body as well? I think so.

Paul speaks of a form of voluntary cremation without any stigma attached to it.

1 Corinthians 13:3 (NKJV) ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

He gains nothing by it nor does he mention any loss by doing it.

Just as God raised up that army in the valley of the Dry Bones, raising them up in physical bodies, I believe that Jesus Christ my Savior can raise up His people from whatever state their remains may be in to a new spiritual body. A body that does not need the dust from which we came.

I can truly understand the financial hardship that is put upon the family when a loved one passes unprepared. It is a very uncomfortable topic to discuss but death is a reality and it is wrong to leave all those decisions and expenses to our loved ones behind.

My step-mother is in her mid-90's at this time and death could come at any time to her or us for that matter. I know cremation is out of the question for her so I already contracted with a funeral director for arrangements. The cost will be over \$8,000.00 for the funeral services alone. I have seen estimated in Houston for cremation starting at \$895.00.

Do you think God wants His children to be in such debt that they become servants to the money lender?
Proverbs 22:7. As in all things we must count the cost.

One of my favorite phrases spoken by Paul is "I do not want you to be ignorant". Don't be fooled by tradition or custom. Seek that which is right in the eyes of God.

It is not a right/wrong issue. Concern about the cost of funerals is understandable, so be assured that it is within your Christian **liberty** to choose whichever option you want.

<http://www.gty.org/resources/questions/QA180/What-does-the-Bible-say-about-cremation?Term=cremation>

It is the attitude - We all can participate in the event of taking communion. But, we know that we can do so unworthily and eating and drinking damnation to our souls. Cremation is the same. If it is done in a heathen fashion as to an idol or another God, then that is wrong. But if it is done as a home going service giving glory to God and focusing on Him and the relationship His with the departed, I cannot see the wrong.

END

William Tyndale

1484–1496

See Foxes book of Martyrs.

William Tyndale could speak seven languages and was proficient in ancient Hebrew and Greek. He was a priest whose intellectual gifts and disciplined life could have taken him a long way in the church—had he not had one compulsion: to teach English men and women the good news of justification by faith.

Tyndale had discovered this doctrine when he read Erasmus's Greek edition of the New Testament. What better way to share this message with his countrymen than to put an English version of the New Testament into their hands? This, in fact, became Tyndale's life passion. It would be a passion, for which Tyndale would pay dearly.

By 1523 his passion had been ignited; in that year he sought permission and funds from the bishop of London to translate the New Testament. The bishop denied his request, and further queries convinced Tyndale the project would not be welcomed anywhere in England.

To find a hospitable environment, he traveled to the free cities of Europe—Hamburg, Wittenberg, Cologne, and finally to the Lutheran city of Worms. There, in 1525, his New Testament emerged: the first translation from Greek into the English language. It was quickly smuggled into England, where it received a less-than-enthusiastic response from the authorities

Finally, in early August 1536, Tyndale was condemned as a heretic, degraded from the priesthood, and delivered to the secular authorities for punishment.

Then he was bound to the beam, and both an iron chain and a rope were put around his neck. Gunpowder was added to the brush and logs. At the signal of a local official, the executioner, standing behind Tyndale, quickly tightened the noose, strangling him. Then an official took up a lighted torch and handed it to the executioner, who set the wood ablaze.

His translations, it would turn out, became decisive in the history of the English Bible, and of the English language. Nearly a century later, when translators of the Authorized, or King James Version, debated how to translate the original languages, eight of ten times, they agreed that Tyndale had it best to begin with.

*Ring-a-ring of roses / A pocketful of posies /
At-choo at-choo! / We all fall down!"*

This charming rhyme still recited by children today dates back to the London Plague of 1665. The "ring of roses" describes the red buboes around the neck of an infected person (swollen lymph nodes); "posies" refers to the herbs or flowers that people carried in their pockets to breathe hoping it would protect them from the disease; "at-choo" refers to a sneeze which was the sign of coming illness. "All fall down" describes the suddenness of death from what is today called "Black Death" or Bubonic Plague.