

# Living & Dying

ONE OF THE MORE NOSTALGIC VOICES in the summer chorus is that of the cicada. It is utterly illogical, but true, that the sound of an ugly brown insect on humid summer days should so fill the mind and heart with rich memories of one's youth. The metallic buzzing drone of the cicada is the sound of sticky summer evenings, the smell of charcoal and hot dogs and grilling hamburgers. It is a sound that reminds us that we once were young, and back then it didn't bother us that we hadn't air conditioning. It reminds us of the way the house smelled when mom was canning pickles.

But the humble cicada also reminds us of something considerably less warm and inviting.

There is no better illustration of fallen man's condition and fate than the humble cicada. For those who do not know Christ, what is living, after all, except years of dwelling in the muck and mire of the earth—then you die. Except that in this, even the lowly cicada enjoys an advantage over the lost. At least the insect dies into nothingness; the one who is lost dies into eternal torment.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 13:47-50

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.

C.S. Lewis

Cicadas have a remarkable life-cycle. Most of their life—often more than a decade—is spent underground. In fact one type of cicada is known as the "17-year locust" (although it is not a locust at all) because it spends *seventeen years* under ground before emerging to mate and die.

After seventeen years of living and maturing under ground while they survive by feeding on the sap of tree roots, thousands of nymphs finally emerge, climb up the tree and secure themselves. As they molt, the adult cicada emerges from the nymphal case, dries in a few hours, mates, then feeds for a month until he or she dies.

The female will deposit as many as six hundred eggs in slits she cuts in tree twigs. When the nymphs hatch about six weeks later, they drop to the ground, burrow down a few centimeters, and begin their generation's seventeen-year life buried in the soil.

Ugly brown things with beady red eyes, the cicadas sing their monotonous drone to attract a mate. Then, with nothing better to do, they munch their days away, waiting to die. After seventeen years buried in the dank recesses of the earth, they enjoy thirty days of fresh air and freedom—then they die.



In contrast to the unbeliever, this world for the Christian is not at all a meaningless drudge ending in an eternity in the dank recesses of despair. The Christian does not spend his earthly days as a prisoner of the soil, day after day sucking thin nourishment from the roots of despair. For the believer this world is an imperfect but suitable platform of praise to our Savior. No longer joined to the soil, we rise above it with uplifted hands and hearts, reaching for the One who has given us, by His grace alone, eternal life with Him.

Thus the inevitable day when we leave the soil of this earth—the day of death and resurrection—need not be something to dread. For the Christian, what is death, after all, but a simple graduation from long-distance to person-to-person praise. But for those who are lost, death is the beginning of an eternity in the dank recesses of despair.

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

John 14:5-6