

THE UPSIDE ABOUT DYING

Introduction

Over the past few months, we have officiated at vigil services and have visited wakes to pray and comfort bereaved families in the Lord. We are soberly reminded of the brevity of life and the nearness of eternity. I am reminded of this illustration of a Sunday School teacher who wanted to test her students to see if they understood the meaning of salvation in trusting in Christ alone to go to heaven. So she asked the 7-year olds in her class a few questions. She begins, "If you do good works and help the poor, will you go to heaven?" They said "NO". Then she tried another, "If you study hard and obey your parents and be a good child, will you go to heaven?" They said "NO". Then she said, "Good, correct." "How then can one go to heaven? A feisty 7-year old boy retorted loudly from the back of the class, "**You have to be dead first!**"

The answer may sound a bit strange or unusual but this boy does have a point to make. In a figurative sense, we must first of all be dead to our sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1,2) and to self and the world (Luke 9:23, 1 John 2:15,16). Jesus says in John 12:24, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* Unless and until we confess our sins and sincerely repent of them and come to believe in Christ alone and receive Him as Saviour and Lord, we cannot go to heaven. **Death is but a door and departure to somewhere better for the believer.** Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* In another sense, when a believer leaves this world in physical death, he will also enter into everlasting life with God in heaven. Our Lord Jesus in John 11:24,25 say, *Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: Believest thou this? As Paul correctly says, absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8-9).*

Dying Victoriously

We can strive to end well on this side of eternity. Consider the following thoughts of meaningful meditation before death for the redeemed :-

1. Remember that God will not forsake us in our grievous agonies.
2. Look upon God as a merciful and faithful Father and trust His infinite goodness.
3. Meditate continually upon the **atonement** and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ and trust the merits of His vicarious atonement on the Cross.
4. Meditate often upon the Lord Jesus Christ in His substitutionary death for us.
5. Meditate on the **victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ** over death and hell.
6. Meditate on the **ascension of Jesus Christ** into heaven and His sitting at the right hand of God.
7. Meditate on our inseparable union with Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit and the fruits of His blessed immortality upon us.
8. Consider that death delivers us from all temporal evils that we daily suffer.

9. Consider that death delivers us from sin, into a life of victory in the heavenlies and from the remains of our corruption.
10. Meditate on the **glory and happiness of our souls** at their departure out of the body one day.
11. Meditate on the **resurrection of our bodies** one day to be reunited with our soul.
12. Meditate on the **destruction of death** and the eternal and most blessed life, which we shall enjoy both in soul and body after our resurrection with the saints.

(adapted from Lockyer, *Last Words of Saints & Sinners*).

Bishop Ken, the author of the Doxology, has taught us to sing:

Teach me to live that I may dread

The grave as little as my bed

Teach me to die, that so I may

Rise glorious at the Judgment Day.

Comfort for the Bereaved

In a Christian funeral, there is a sense of **hope, comfort and peace** for the bereaved family unlike the unregenerate dead. Though there is short-term pain and grief, yet we should have the everlasting consolation of the Holy Spirit that is stronger than any temporal loss. Psalm 116:15 says, *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints* and Revelations 14:13, *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.* Because of the resurrection of Christ, we who are in Christ too have the blessed hope and expectation of the resurrection of our bodies to be reunited with our spirit one day. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says, *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Therefore be not afraid of death, but be courageous to rejoice and trust in the Lord when the day of death approaches. We are to **be ready to leave this world** to be with Christ eternally any time (2 Corinthians 5:7-9).

Christ is the only Way to eternal life.

Last Words of Dying Men

Consider the following parting words of sinners and saints on their death bed:

“The last words of people can also tell us where they will spend eternity. The 18th century French infidel and philosopher, Voltaire’s last words were, **“I am abandoned by God and man. I shall go to Hell. I wish I’d never been born.”** How different were the words of the 19th century American evangelist DL Moody: **“Earth is receding. Heaven is opening. It is my coronation day.”** The final words of people may give us their summary of their own lives. On his deathbed, Jay Gould, 19th Century American industrialist, financier and one of the richest men in the world, summed up his life this way: “I am the most miserable devil on earth.” By contrast, the Apostle Paul, a first century evangelist and church planter, viewed his life with thankfulness to God this way and was ready for his departure for heaven any time” (2 Timothy 4:4-8). [Quoted from *Grace & Truth Magazine*, March 2004]. There is hope, purpose and joy before the grave. Will your last breath be one of peace and comfort or fear and frustration? Only the Saviour Christ can make the former a reality for you when you trust in Him as your Saviour and Lord and repent of your sins.

Do it now before it is too late.

Conclusion

Have you written your epitaph or chosen your funeral hymns? We have witnessed the deaths of a few brethren in Christ recently. Our lives are like a vapour that can vanish away. We need to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom and to redeem the time for the days are evil. We need to pray and learn to inhabit the future not just the present. We praise God for words of spiritual comfort and truth that strengthen the afflicted family of the deceased as they seek Him in their last days of their earthly lives. **Are you ready for heaven?** It is a joy to be with the Lord forever where there is no more sorrow, death, pain or tears but eternal bliss with the saints forevermore. May the God of the living give us the blessed readiness and the sense of **relief and solace to the dying and the bereaved family** as we look up to Christ our God to complete this race of life victoriously in due course.

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