

The Wednesday Word, Mar. 18, 2009: Did Jesus Die Well?

The more majestic Jesus appears to us, the more confidence we will have in Him in both life and death. Never was Christ more regal than when He conquered death at Calvary. It was there, at the cross, that he did away with sin, destroyed demonic authorities and brought about the 'death' itself.

To see something of the awesome nature of the cross we must remember that there was no connection between Jesus and death. Jesus had life in Himself; He was not merely the giver of life but was life itself! It lacks accuracy to say, therefore, that He was divorced from death since they had never at anytime been joined or related.

Death was for sinners, but Christ was born sinless and had lived sinlessly. There was, consequently, no reason within Him to die! He had neither broken the Law nor disobeyed the Father thus death had no claim over Him. No power on earth could kill Him. He was not exaggerating when, speaking of His life, He said, "No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" John 10:18. His death, then, was an intense manifestation of His royal power for He willed it, choosing the very moment when He would dismiss His spirit. What immense sovereignty Christ demonstrated in and by dying!

But consider this, when Jesus hung on the cross, the One who is 'the Life' actually tasted death (Heb 2:9). Many a man has died without tasting death. For some, death comes in an instant, but Christ's death was slow and painful. There, at the cross, He was roasted alive in the fires of wrath. He fully tasted the consequence of our sin. It was not the physical pain that made the cross so awful, it was our sin. Jesus alone knew the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He had an acute abhorrence of sin, yet He willingly bore our sin to redeem and purchase a people for the glory of God. Throughout the ages, many of God's people have derived wonderful help and comfort from meditating upon how their Savior faced death at the cross. The cross was Christ's deathbed and it instantly confronts us with an extraordinary picture of faith. Remember how, as Christ died, He quoted scriptures and prayed? In Hebrew culture it was customary to audibly repeat the first line of a Psalm so that others around could either repeat the Psalm or meditate upon it. Jesus in this manner repeated the first line of Psalm 22 then "occupied His thoughts with speaking to Himself and to God in the words of this Psalm" (See John Stevenson: Christ On The Cross).

Yet, some say that Jesus didn't appear to have had much faith since He thought that the Father had forsaken Him. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. Christ had not lost His faith in God; rather He called out to Him! This is not the action of someone who has suddenly realized that God is not there, but is the act of one who, by faith, embraces the reality of the God who always is. Nevertheless, as our substitute, at that point in time, there was a judicial forsakenness. There, when He hung on the cross as our representative, our sins came between Him and the Father. Jesus bore the very forsakenness due to us. He was forsaken in our place and in our stead.

Does this have any bearing on how believers will die? Indeed it does! It means that God will not and cannot forsake us since Christ was forsaken in our place! Christ, because of His love for the Father and for us, has endured our separation from God on our behalf. Believe this and you will have a good death.

Notice also, that as well as having the Word on His lips and prayer in His heart, Christ died with full confidence in God saying, "Father, in to thy hands I commend my Spirit!" He gladly and joyfully delivered Himself into the safety of His Father's hands. That's confidence and faith!

In conclusion, let us briefly ask whether or not gospel believers, like their Master, know how to have a good death. Let's see what they said as they died.

"I see Heaven open and Jesus on the right hand of God."

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1489-1556), burnt at the stake for believing in Justification by Grace through Faith.

"Is this dying? Is this all? Is this what I feared when I prayed against a hard death? Oh, I can bear this! I can bear this!"

Cotton Mather, (the most famous of the late 17th century New England Puritan preachers).

Christ is worth more than ten thousand worlds. O let me catch a glimpse of Thee, and then drop into eternity.

Watts Wilkinson: 19th Century gospel preacher.

I shall go to my Father tonight. My work is done; I have nothing to do but go to my Father.

Lady Selina Shirley, Countess of Huntingdon: 1707-1791: ardent financial supporter of the gospel.

Now I have not long to live. The time of my departure is at hand. I am going to my desired Heaven. I am most willing to die. I have, blessed be God, nothing else to do but die. Death is my best friend next to Jesus Christ. I am sure I will be with Jesus Christ when I die.

William Gouge; Gospel Preacher, Writer 1575-1653

"I am going to him whom my soul loves, or rather who has loved me with an everlasting love, which is the sole ground for my consolation."

John Owen—one of the greatest of the Puritan thinkers.

"Into Thy hands I commend my spirit! Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth."

Martin Luther

Isaac Toms an 18th century gospel preacher said on his deathbed, "I perceive I am slipping into eternity." A visiting minister began to say to Him that he was going on to receive a great reward to which Toms replied, "Sir when I arrive at the world of blessedness, I shall shout, Grace, grace!"

When his doctor told him that his pulse was growing weaker, Augustus Toplady, the 18th century preacher and hymn writer replied, "Why, that is a good sign that my death is fast approaching and, blessed be God, I can add that my heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory." A few

days later when sensing the imminent loom of death, he burst into tears into tears saying, “It will not be long before God takes me, for no mortal man can live after the glories God has manifested to my soul.”

There are many, many such illustrations from the deathbeds of God’s people. But what if, when we are on our deathbeds, we are too far-gone to remember any of the gospel promises? That’s a good question that can best be answered by again pointing to the deathbed scene of a dear saint of God. Some years ago, in Scotland, an elderly Christian was in terrible distress on his deathbed. “Oh, Pastor,” he said, “for years I have relied upon the promises of God, but now in the hour of death I can’t remember a single one to comfort me.” The pastor replied, “My brother, do you think that God will forget any of His promises?” A smile came over the old man’s face as he calmly and joyfully said, “No, no, He won’t!” Praise the Lord, now I can fall asleep in Jesus and trust Him to remember all His promises and bring me safely to Heaven.” Peace flooded his soul, and a short time later he died.

And that’s the Gospel Truth!