

Abandoned to the Joy of Complete Surrender

Have you ever considered what will happen the moment you die? Are you ready for it? Do you know what “being ready” entails? Believer or not, when it happens—and it will—you may be in for a major surprise.

In 2 Timothy 4:6-7 (ESV), the apostle Paul writes, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”

Can each of us honestly say the same? Have we fought the good fight? Have we finished the course? Did we even start the course or did we treat it as unimportant? Have we kept the faith, or was our faith a mere sentiment?

“In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also *to all who have loved His appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:7-8, NASB 1995, emphasis added).

Will we love His appearing? Do we look forward to being with Him forever? Do we love Him as He described love (John 14:15, 21, 23-24)? Do we genuinely want to be like Him—to live as He lived in the beauty of holiness (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 96:9)?

Author Lee Strobel has noted: “There’s a difference between wanting to avoid hell and genuinely wanting to spend eternity with God in heaven.”

English evangelist David Watson was faced with the same question as he prepared to die from inoperable cancer: “If heaven is really going to be heaven, then why was I threatened by death? I had to get from being theoretically willing to be

in heaven, but really wanting to be on earth, to actually wanting to be in heaven. I had to check up on: How far did I know God's love; How far did I really love God? How far was I absolutely sure about a future life after death?"

The Moment of Truth

Recently I found myself as close to death as one can possibly come without actually dying. I'd had a few brushes with death before, but this time it was different. This time, questions raised by Paul's teaching in 2 Timothy 4 took on a sense of finality.

As I was being rushed into a sextuple bypass operation, everything changed. In the twinkling of an eye and as far as I knew, my chance to do God's will on earth was over. The verdict in the case of "David versus God" was about to be handed down by the most supreme of Supreme Courts.

Though I knew I would go to heaven because of my faith in Jesus Christ, I also knew that the post-salvation assessment of my life would not be what I'd imagined. In that moment of reckoning, God made it clear that if I died at that hour, most of the rewards that had been planned for me would be lost (1 Cor. 3:15; Eph. 2: 8-10).

I had neglected the most important things—primarily a serious pursuit of an intimate relationship with God Himself.

The motive for most of the good things I had done had been my own glory.

To a large extent, I hadn't done right things out of love for God but for love of my own reputation and legacy.

I hadn't truly forsaken the world or my attachment to the things in it (1 John 2:15).

Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Matt. 16:26a). Some try to leave

their mark on the *world* rather than in *heaven* and lose their soul in the process. Others lose their intended rewards, which are eternal. They are saved, but as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15).

There in the hospital, the deepest recesses of my heart were being laid bare, and my chance to improve them had come to a swift and irreversible end. This shocking moment took me completely by surprise.

Had I truly believed the things I'd so proudly proclaimed? It was clear to me that the veracity of faith assertions lies not in their proclamation but in the fruit born from them (Matt. 7:17).

It was not going to be as easy to "go gentle into that good night" as I had imagined. The tears that God wipes from our eyes in heaven will in part be tears of regret for not having loved and served our Savior in a manner commensurate with His having suffered so horribly to save us from an eternity in hell (John 15:13; Rev. 7:17).

Mercifully, God decided to give me one last chance to get it right and to share this life-shattering reality with everyone. Though His assessment of my life had shaken me, it had also sobered and strengthened me. It had been a severe test, but a severe mercy as well.

When the Fat Lady Sings

We were never meant to die. That's why death is so hard for us. Death is Satan's domain, and he is totally in character when he approaches us at that moment to jeer, lie, terrify and tear away all faith, hope and sense of being loved by God. But C.S. Lewis once observed. "God loves us not because we are lovable but because He is love!"

For unbelievers, the shock and awe that will come at death are infinitely worse. At her death, Queen Elizabeth I, then the

most powerful woman in the world, cried out: "All my possessions for a moment of time!" As he lay dying, writer Thomas Payne sobbed, "I am on the edge of hell here alone!" while Chancellor of England Sir Thomas Scott lamented, "Until this moment I thought there was neither a God nor a hell. Now I know that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty!"

The final curtain for believers can be quite different, however. At the moment of his death, evangelist Dwight L. Moody exclaimed, "Is this dying? Why this is bliss! Earth is receding; heaven is opening; God is calling. I must go!"

Moody was ready to meet his maker. He was prepared. Not only had he given his life in devotion to Jesus Christ, but he had also taken advantage of earthly opportunities to live for the glory of the one who died to pay the penalty for his sins.

But are we ready?

Though they usually deny it, most people are secretly afraid of death, especially when they are diagnosed with terminal cancer or start having chest pains. Until then, they generally avoid thinking about it, as if their turned faces will make it go away.

Except for those who are alive at the return of Jesus Christ, we will all die, and the glory from men that we strived for will crumble instantly into dust. Only what was done for Christ will last (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

As I Lay Dying

During my brush with death, I experienced complete surrender to God's will for the first time. I had no choice. Alone in my hospital bed, I was forced to abandon myself in absolute surrender to His mercy. I had never been dependent on Him like that before. It was a brave new world.

God showed me that anything I had ever done for Him had been a gift of grace. He never needed me to serve Him. He had privileged me with the opportunity to do so as well as to be rewarded for it. All along, it had been Him working in me to bring fruit from my efforts (Phil. 2:13).

When we see Him in heaven, the Bible says we will know that all our good works were inspired and empowered by Him. We will rightly cast our crowns at His feet, understanding for perhaps the first time that *our* crowns are really *His* crowns (Rev. 4:10-11).

As I lay dying in the operating room, I was catapulted into another dimension of perception and realized that most things I'd considered of great consequence weren't. Indeed, in light of what God considers important, they were straw.

Near the end of his life, Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest and most prolific theologians of all time, received a revelation from God that caused him to stop writing altogether. He confessed, "The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me."

He experienced a major paradigm shift and merciful course correction that I too experienced. Out of the blue, life became consumed by a singular desire to know and love Jesus in truth and to love others as myself (Matt. 22:36-40).

This is the deep cry of every heart, whether we know it or not.

During my experience of near death, it was as if God saved me from experiencing physical death so that I might learn to die to myself.

After the operation and for weeks beyond, I cried when thinking or talking about my brush with death. Life as I had known it became as nothing. The things of the world no longer

interested me as I was forged even more purely into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Intellectually, I had known that Jesus was everything I had ever wanted: love personified. But now, the utter realness of that truth came rushing into my soul. Life had finally begun! Now I was living in the real world.

Our Destiny in Heaven

J.I. Packer made this astute observation in his book *Knowing God*: “When people come to know God, losses and crosses cease to matter to them; what they have gained simply banishes these things from their minds.”

In heaven, life is transformed into an eternal, intimate marriage with God Himself. He transforms time into eternity and changes everything that can be changed (John 17:3).

When we ignore God during times of trial and tragedy, a veil blinds us to His beauty, nobility, tenderness and power. It also blinds us to the true cause of suffering and evil: Satan Himself and the deceitfulness of our own hearts. But when we read and believe God’s Word, the blindness is taken away (2 Cor. 3:16).

The apostle John tells us in Revelation 21:3-4 (BSB), “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. ... they will be His people. ‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away.’”

When we have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, true life has only just begun. In John 17 (NIV), Jesus tells us, “Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”

Charles Wesley’s wonderful hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” further reveals the truth about our divine

destiny:

“Finish, then, Thy new creation/ Pure and spotless let us be/
Let us see Thy great salvation/ Perfectly restored in Thee/
Changed from glory into glory/ Till in heav’n we take our
place/ Till we cast our crowns before Thee/ Lost in wonder,
love and praise.”

Be encouraged by this promise: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16-18, NIV).

Is loving and serving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength worth it? Is it the only appropriate response to His sacrifice for us on the cross? You bet it is!

One day a beggar saw a magi and his entourage approaching from a distance. He was quite poor, owning only the bowl of rice in his hands. As the magi drew near, the beggar cried out “Oh Magi, if you would please share with me out of the bounty that God has placed into your hands, I might live another day.”

The magi stepped down from his carriage and said to the beggar, “I am so very hungry today. Would you give me your bowl of rice?”

The beggar was astonished and a bit peeved that such a rich man would be asking him for anything when he was the one in need. But he ran his fingers through the rice in his bowl and finally brought two grains to give to the magi. The magi thanked him, mounted his carriage and rode off down the road.

By then, the beggar was fuming and ran his fingers through the rice once again, suddenly noticing a piece of gold the size and shape of a grain of rice. He frantically scrounged around

some more and found a second grain of gold, but no more. Looking up as the magi began to fade from sight in the distance, he cried, “Magi—if I had only known, I would have given you the entire bowl!”

Let’s give the entire bowl to the one who loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son as a sacrifice for your sins and mine—“that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16b).

Adapted from Going Gentle Into That Good Night by Dr. David Kyle Foster.

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