

Eternal Life can be Found

In the midst of life there is death. Death strikes unremittingly. It cannot be avoided. Man has always been puzzled by the riddle of death in life. Life does not need to be explained, but death needs to be accounted for. We experience life. Death seems so unnatural and irrational. Within us we feel that this life is not the whole story. The life we live in space and time must somehow continue on. Tennyson affirmed that man was not made to die (In Memoriam). The poet Yeats wrote:

Nor dread nor hope attend A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all.
Some brave souls look into a lifeless future.

Bertrand Russell wrote in *A Free Man's Worship*, "No fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual beyond the grave All the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon day brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system." A sad philosophy of life! These lines remind me of the ancient Stoics who claimed that Death "doesn't matter," that it is "kind nature's signal for retreat," and that we ought to regard it with indifference. But very few are indifferent to the prospect of death. Modern man, with wonder drugs to prolong life, and mortuaries which try to soften the hardness of death with clever cosmetics and satin lined coffins, is not so aware of it. Even the many violent deaths seen on TV do not seem quite real. They happen on the screen. They are part of the show. Therefore, they don't touch the real self.

In the past man knew that death can be expected in the midst of life; plagues, war and starvation were all too often his lot. Yet sudden death is just as common today. As a minister I have had to officiate at several funerals of those suddenly snatched away by death either through accident or heart seizure.

Can't our consumer society cope with death any longer? Why does our society deliberately ignore death? I believe that this is the reason: hope has been lost. Many no longer have their roots in historic Christianity.

The ancient Greeks argued the pros and cons of immortality, philosophizing away their fears, the early church spoke words of hope and comfort. Christians witnessed to a future of physical resurrection. The resurrection is still a key doctrine of the Christian faith, but it tends to be downgraded in our day.

A number of Biblical scholars consider the physical resurrection unacceptable. But anyone who doubts the resurrection receives no support from the New Testament. The Christian hope is not fulfilled at death. The Christian does not merely live on. Death is unnatural. Christ shed tears when he stood at the grave of Lazarus. He saw the awfulness of death. Death is the last enemy. But this enemy has been conquered by Jesus Christ when He rose again after His own death.

The apostle Thomas doubted this historic happening and the Lord said to him: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting believe." When Jesus appeared to the two men on the way to Emmaus He did not appear as a ghost, but as a real person. The disciples, when Jesus appeared amongst them at the beach, "gave Him a piece of boiled fish, and He took it and ate it before them"

Death is always tragic. But for the Christian there is hope. The resurrection promises a full orb'd life of radiant glory. Death has been conquered for those who are in Christ. The grave is a resting place until the dawning of the new and final day - the day of the resurrection. "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, and we shall be changed." There is more to life than death. The resurrection eases the pain and disperses despair. It brings the promise of a destiny far greater than the immortality of the soul. A Christian sorrows as he too is affected by the brokenness of a sinful world and the awful disruption caused by death - but he does not lack hope - that hope as found in the risen Christ.

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