

Surrendering but not Succumbing

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I wonder if we have missed a powerful ingredient that lies at the heart of the effectiveness of the death of Christ. Given our natural aversion and resistance to death and everything associated with it, the fact that our Lord's victory over death involved surrendering to it can easily escape our appreciation. He overcame that final enemy not through resistance, not in an aggressive attack mode, but by embracing it and yielding to it. He willingly permitted its assault upon His Person. Of course, it was the place of death in the will of His Father that He accepted; but acceptance hardly conveys the dynamic of His determination to face that ancient and final enemy with the meekness of a lamb. The carnal man, even armed with scripture, approaches it with the braggadocio born of insecurity and fear.

Resurrection life, victory over death, the display of the glory of God in an incorruptible body; this has captured the imagination of many Christians in a new and admittedly fresh and unconventional way. A growing number of the saints are being freed from what amounts to a wishful-thinking approach to the challenge of realizing Christ's resurrection power. The Spirit of God has pulled the switch and sent us down a new track on which we can no longer simply hope for our final transfiguration as part of a disappearing act suggestive of a P. T. Barnum show and worthy of Houdini, but instead as intrinsic to the life of Christ already indwelling us. The life of Christ, who Paul says is "our life," conquered death, conquers death even now and always will until that divine demonstration is fully played out.

In our rush to shed every trace of the rapture mindset, the someday "I'll fly away" attitude, the "in the sweet bye and bye" avoidance of confrontation with Him who IS resurrection and is what He is in us NOW; has that Christ-quality of not reacting to death's threat but welcoming its attack escaped our notice? Is there an attitude in the mind of Christ that is proactive and not reactive when it faces death, but proactive with an essential dynamic of surrender? He surrendered

to death but He did not succumb to it. He yielded, but in yielding He was not defeated, He was gloriously victorious. By its own insane stranglehold on the Lord of Life, death attached itself to the final act of dying (the once-for-all death of Christ) and in that divine act of dying, death died. The momentum of its own aggression played into its own defeat.

I submit the following to you, my fellow Christians: The experience of victory over death belongs to the Body of Christ, not to disconnected members. There is only one Body. The Body that went into the sepulcher donated by Joseph of Arimathea two millennia ago and which was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father is the same subsequently ascended, enthroned, exalted and glorified Body of Christ which we are. It is Himself, multiplied in many, yet the many are one Body, one Christ. One Seed was buried in death to come forth, no longer alone but bearing its ordained fruit of righteousness, not an abstract righteousness but a people who in Him are the righteousness of God. It is the one Body that Paul wrote of along with the one Spirit, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, etc. That Body, including those who are no longer visibly with us, must not, in the name of final victory, seek to avoid death but seek to demonstrate Christ's victory while being given over to death. Am I saying that our glorious hope is what we were told after all; that is either by rapture or by dying and going to heaven awaiting an eschatological event that will join our perfected spirits to new bodies? Is there not to be an order of saints who shall look death in the eye and send it away with a whimper? Is there not a people who shall realize experientially the rising up of incorruption from within? Indeed there is.

I want to be very clear in what I'm saying. It is this, that when we have finally, fully exhibited the same attitude of Christ in respect to death, an attitude which knows that when death has done its worst it will be seen to be that unavoidable appointment which provides the backdrop for the display of life. There will be a company of saints whose encounter with death, involving their own non-fearful, non-avoidance of its grasp, will climax the Body's ultimate confrontation and who will not escape death but will, in one moment, one instantaneous moment enter its bowels and emerge, not merely alive but incorruptibly alive, alive with death to nevermore be an issue of life for it has been swallowed up. Hear this saints, SWALLOWED UP,

NOT SPIT OUT. The whole Body awaits those last members who shall demonstrate that which they know is not theirs exclusively but theirs along with all the saints of all the ages for the sake of all creation.

The spirit of that ancient spiritual perversion of true victory, namely triumphalism, pervades much of the theology of those who have understandably reacted to the weak gospel that was fed them for years in the institutional church. There was no understanding of the inviolable truth that our mortal bodies shall be quickened by the Spirit that indwells us, not by some external force that, as it were, will grab us by the hair and yank us into the stratosphere to be hocus-pocused into incorruption. But that Spirit which raised Christ from the dead has in Him the mind of Christ which says, "Bring it on if you must Father and we, You and I, You and we will drink this cup to the last dregs" and death shall find itself where it cannot exist any longer, in the Body of Christ, in God our Father. Triumphalism always has at its heart the avoidance of the cross, the avoidance of the divine appointment.

There are so many things which are part and parcel of our encounter with death and we want to spit them out at first taste but we are called to swallow the bitter pill and destroy it by the life within us. The eternal purpose of God does not involve only life, but life out of death. Death has come into the world because of the will of our Father, not because of sin. Death came into the world by sin, not because of it. There is a difference and the reader might use different semantics if he or she grasps what I am trying to say. God did not hope that death could be kept out of the world by man refusing to sin. Death was a providentially ordered appointment for all men and it was by sin that it entered. Jesus met the appointment for us, but not instead of us. In him the divine appointment has been kept fully and in him death has died. Had we kept the appointment in ourselves it never would have ended, but in Him and with Him it is a "once-for-all," been-there-done-that appointment never to be repeated. Outside of Christ, death just keeps on dying, but in Him, where the Reality lies, death has fully died.

You say, brother John, then why must I still face it and deal with it? The answer lies, to repeat, that He did not do it instead of you but

with you, for you and you with Him and His participation finalizes the process. The answer lies also in the truth that His death, though indisputably a historical event, is in the Spirit. He offered Himself in the eternal Spirit. In the Spirit, what was is and what will be is. It is all right now in the I AM God. In Him, now death and life meet and death is vanquished. Only a little longer will God permit the lie that presents death as a real continuing force to assail us. When the Sun of Righteousness arises that lying fog, which hides the truth is burned off and that is now.

Stay tuned for more serious, seminal samplings.

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