**LOOKING DEATH IN THE FACE**

***Good News: I’m Going To Die!***

I know it flies in the face of all logic and reason but what Solomon said is really true, “It is better to go to a funeral than to a party.”  Well, he didn’t say it exactly that way, but that is an accurate commentary of what he meant when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 7,

​1 A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one’s birth;
2 Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting,
   For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.
3 Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

How can dying in an old pain-racked body be “*better*” than the birth of a newborn baby?
How can attending a memorial service in a funeral home be “*better*” than a party in a playboy mansion?
How can sorrow and weeping be “*better*” than happiness and laughter?

The inspired wise man offered this philosophical three-question riddle, so let him now offer us satisfactory solutions.  In Socrates fashion he doesn’t just feed you the answer, instead he makes you draw the logical conclusion.

For instance, would you rather have a good reputation among your peers, or very expensive perfume that would really impress the opposite sex?  A man given to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life (I Jn. 2:15) would not answer that the way a man after God’s own heart would (Ac 13:22).  One “*sets his mind on things of the earth*,” while the other “*seeks those things which are above*” (Col. 3:1-2).

Next, in a house of feasting one rarely, if ever, thinks beyond the present pursuit of happiness.  He is loving his “*eat, drink and be merry*” moment (I Cor. 15:32).  There is such a thing as “*the pleasures of sin”* even if it is only *“for a season*” (Heb. 11:25).

Finally, in the “*house of mirth*” is found the “*heart of fools*.”  This is because the fool says, “there is no God” even if he is a Bible-toting, Church-going, Prayers-flowing religious man.  Just as the religious Israelites were the objects of David’s “*the fool has said in his heart there is no God*” quote (Psa. 14:1), so today many “Christians” live *as if* there is no God.  There is no difference between a professing real atheist and a practicing worldly theist.  One is equal to the other in the sight of God.  They both party-hearty.

But go to a funeral and hear a gospel preacher deliver a “*prepare to meet thy God*” sermon (Amos 4:12), and suddenly “*the living will take it to heart*.”  Hearing a Bible-laced sermon on texts like Hebrews 10:26-31 which end with “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God*;” or 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 which sobers up the hearer to learn that the righteous judgment of God exacts the vengeance of flaming fire on all “*who do not obey the gospel*.”  Perhaps only at a funeral is the atheist, the wayward Christian, and the deceived professing disciple jolted into reality.  I have seen it time and again, “*by a sad countenance the heart is made better*.”

But allow me to leave Solomon for a moment as we attend the autobiographical funeral of the apostle Paul.  He wrote his own epitaph and eulogy.  On his tombstone (which I’m sure he never was given as he was likely buried in a pauper’s grave or placed in the wall of the Roman catacombs), Paul wrote his valedictory address for Timothy to remember him by, then to share with the world.  In 2 Timothy 4 he describes his view of death.

*6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

In this eulogy he makes us look at death in four ways:

1. Death – Take A Realistic Look
 “*The time of my departure is at hand*.”  He doesn’t ignore it.  He doesn’t deny it.
 He doesn’t euphemize it.  He faces it squarely.  To truly live a life worth living is
 to measure it by its ending.  I live knowing I must soon die and face judgment.
2. Death – Take A Backward Look
 “*I have fought a good fight, finished the course, kept the faith*.”  To live life in such a way that you can look at your past and feel God’s pleasure, knowing you have walked by faith to your last breath, collapsing across the finish line into the waiting arms of Jesus, makes death a “Welcome Home” celebration.
3. Death – Take A Forward Look
“*In the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day*.”  To the party-hearty crowd death is the great spoiler.  To the godly, life on earth is but the appetizer before the main meal of heavenly-hash, topped off with angel-food cake as desert.
4. Death – Take An Outward Look
“*And not only me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*.”  Paul would be thrilled to get totally lost in the crowd, just be one of the “great cloud of witnesses” gathered with all the sheep at Christ’s right hand.  Christians see death as a “we,” not a “me,” event.  We believe the more the merrier.  All are welcome.  Whosoever will may come.  We hope billions get the victor’s wreath and the gold medal.

Two wise men, Solomon and Paul, teach us how to look death in the face, then smile.  While the worldly shutter and shake at the prospect of death, the godly believe the day of death, the funeral home, and a grieving heart is ***better*** than the best day of a millionaire playboy.  I would much rather be Paul at his execution than Caesar at his coronation.  What about you?

Until tomorrow… look death in the face, shout the good news – “I am going to die!  Hallelujah!  Praise the Lord.”

I love you.

- Rick