

Death, Our Friend?

Just this last week I received a very strange phone call from Virginia; it began with what sounded like a young man asking me if I was familiar with John 1:1-3, 14. The upshot of the conversation, once he finally got around to it, was that he wanted to point out that Jesus was probably, in fact, King Arthur of mythological fame and the disciples were the knights of the round table. He even tried to make an argument that said that the name Arthur actually represented the idea of authority. When I pointed out that King Arthur is nothing more than a myth, his response was that many people believed that Jesus is nothing more than a myth. By this time I was picking up on the idea that this young man was trying to do, or at least seemed to be trying. So I told him that I didn't understand how so many in the world demand respect for their thoughts and opinions but were so intolerant of different thoughts and opinions of others. This triggered a rather volatile and profanity laced diatribe right up until I broke the connection.

But it did serve to get me thinking along these lines.

How we perceive or understand who and what Jesus is, defines how we understand the relationship of what everything else is to Him. If we think that Jesus is no more than a myth, then anything and everything connected to Him becomes a myth, by necessity. If we think of Jesus as a man, albeit a good man, we then must understand that He has no more bearing or impact on the world or anything else than we or any other man does. If we believe that He is deity, then our understanding of what He is to all creation changes accordingly. Our relationship to Jesus determines our relationship to the universe. On the surface, that may sound a little arrogant, but that is what Paul says in...



1 Cor 3:21-23



21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, **23** and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

If we belong to Him, everything belongs to us. If we are His servants, all things are our servants.

Paul's point doesn't speak to possession or utilization, but rather harmony, a harmony of being in union with and subjection to the creator, God.

In 1 Cor. 8 Paul is talking about the eating of meat and brings up the discussion of the many idolatrous gods that people of the world worship in various and a sundry ways. Paul points out that there is only one God, and then he makes a statement of affirmation that still rings true to this day...

1 Cor 8:6



6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

Here, in Paul's statement of faith, we see again the point he made in the passage we read in 1 Cor. 3, there is a harmony in all of creation that can only be found in a relationship with the creator.

The world sees that relationship in many different ways. Man has concluded that any form of a relationship with God is OK. It can be based on what man's wisdom dictates as sufficient, it can be a partial acceptance of God's word, or it can be a compromising mixture of the two. The problem is that none of the above fit with God's idea of what the relationship must be. In...

2 Cor 8:3-5

3

3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, **4** begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, **5** and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Paul holds up the Macedonians as an example of how we are to come to God, that even in their own poverty and affliction they first gave themselves to God.

Christ gives us that same commandment in...

Matt 22:36-37

4

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" **37** And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

Everything we have, everything we do, everything we are, our HEART, SOUL, and MIND, is what God desires from us in our relationship with Him.

God's creation is not to be feared. The child of God, he who has first given himself to God, understands that all things that exist, exist by Him, from Him, and for Him.

Think of it this way, the shadows that man fears are, after all, a quiet friend, reminding us of the light, for without light there is no shadow.

There are so many things in this world that man fears. Either because he doesn't understand it, he can't defeat it, or he can't control it; disease, flood or famine, natural disasters, even the circumstances of life.

Which brings us to our lesson **5** There is one great fear that most men have, that of death. Multiple billions of dollars are spent each year to fight off that great equalizer of all mankind. Man seeks to find ways around it, ways to push it further away. New drugs, surgeries, even what appears to be the silly notion of things like cryogenics. Man is desperately fighting the losing battle against his final demise.

Yet, if we believe what Paul writes, then death, being an institution of God, exists by Him, from Him, and for Him. All of God's creation exists to serve Him and by extension His children. But, when we are brought face to face with death, either when we contemplate our own, or we are faced with the stark reality of it in family, friends, and loved ones, the question arises, how can this harsh, ultimate end, which we cannot command or control, serve us? Did it serve those we lost? If so how? And if, in serving them, how did it serve us?

The scriptures are not silent on the subject of death.

Ps 55:4

6

4 My heart is in anguish within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Death can be terrifying...

Ps 18:4-5

7

4 The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. 5 The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me.

The Psalmist writes of the terror of death, but even more so, the terror of death when faced while ungodly.

Can death be here to serve us? Paul says, Yes; and if we have as firm a belief in Paul's Lord as he had, our answer will be the same. What we are going to try and look at is the conversion of this last great enemy of man into a friend, the assurance that we may all have, that death is ours, though not in the sense that we can command it, yet in the sense that it ministers to our highest good.

Over the years, Death has been depicted by artists and writers in many, many ways. But ultimately it is really seen in just two basic ways, as a Destroyer or as a Friend. In the one case it is seen in the accident that takes the life of a child or beloved parent or loved one and is despised and feared as that sudden appearance of dread. In the other, it comes into a quiet church somewhere, where an aged child of God sits with folded arms and closed eyes, and an open Bible by his side, and endless peace upon his face. I know of a man who was sitting at his table with his Bible open while he was studying for a class he was teaching. The student found him with his head on the table where he had laid it to die. In the first scenario, Death comes as a thief, stealing what no one wants taken, but in the second it has brought rest to the weary, and the welcome dawning of a new life to the believer, and is a friend. It depends on the person to whom it comes, whether it comes as a destroyer or as a helper. Of course, for all of us, the mere physical facts remain the same, the pain, the slow torture of the impending loss, or the sharp agony of its instantaneous tearing apart of us from our loved ones. It doesn't take too long living in this world to understand that the circumstances of this life, at times dictate that Death to one man will be a Destroyer, while to another it is a Friend.

Since, over the thousands of years that man has been fighting death, it has become overly apparent that death cannot be defeated, why is it so difficult for man to accept the fact that he must die? Death is as much an institution of God as is birth...

Heb 9:27

8

27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

It can't be fought, it can't be avoided, and it can't be stopped. There is an old saying, if it is inevitable and you can't stop the inevitable, the wise man learns to embrace the inevitable. Paul speaks to this idea of the inevitable in...

Rom 7:24

9

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

There are some elements to fear. What is it that makes the darkness of death, the enemy to so many? Shaver Lake, that Karen and I enjoy going to, where we got married, sits at about 5000' elevation, the road to it is fairly typical of a lot of mountain roads, windy, switch backs and rather

steep in some places except for a section we call the four lane. Because of the lumber truck traffic Cal Trans took a section about 8 – 10 miles long up the side of the mountain and widened it into four lanes and did a decent job of taking most of the turns out of it. What makes it unique is that it rises from Auberry, at about 1500' to the crest of the mountain at about 4500' to 4800'. During the rainy season when the fog sets in, coming down from Shaver is like sitting at the beach. You see the fog rolling at your feet before you like the waters of the Pacific and as you get to the fog level it's like driving into that ocean. In a space of just a few feet you go from bright sunlit skies to being enveloped in the fog with almost no visibility at all. That is how many people view death, like a step off the edge of a precipice in a fog; a step into the unknown, and the unknown scares people.

The unknown may very well be the greatest fear that man has. What's around the corner, what's it going to be like on that new job, what's waiting for me in the dark that I can't see, these are the kind of things that cause fear in our hearts because of the unknown.

That is where our fear lurks, the unknown, and because it is impossible for a man to have any clear vision of what it is that is coming to meet him, he fears the darkness of the future.

Death holds the greatest unknown, the greatest darkness we will ever encounter. How can that kind of fear be of service to us?

Another of the elements, which make up the fear Death holds for many of us, is that it seems to take us away from the familiar, the activities and occupations of our life. The thought that death might be the precursor to rest sometimes attracts the weary or harassed, or they fancy it does, but that tends to be an act of desperation. Sometimes we become so overwhelmed with life and exhausted from our efforts to cope with that life that we just want the world to stop so we can get off. That is not what we are speaking of when we talk of embracing death as our friend. To the world, there is no joy, but a chill, in thinking about the final destination of death.

I spoke with my mother when she knew that her time was coming to a close. Mom had a strong faith and knew that she had made her best effort to be a faithful child of God. But she struggled mightily to hang on to this life. I asked her why, and her response was that she felt she had not accomplished what she set out to do. I was confused, she had been a loving and loyal wife of some 60 years to my father, she had been a compassionate, caring, and giving friend to all that came into her life, she had been the consummate child and sibling to her family as she took care of both her mother and father and two of her siblings until death, and she had given all her love and effort to raising her 4 children. I didn't understand. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "I need to know that all my children will go to heaven." She was not willing to let go until she felt that she had done all that she could possibly do to help ensure her children's salvation.

The sense of feeling that we are leaving a work undone holds for us probably the greatest unknown we will face. What is to become of those I leave behind? Maybe that is the nobler work for us to do in our death, to give the greatest example we can, that of being faithful unto death.

Rev 2:10-11

10

10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. **11** 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

There is nothing greater we can give to all who know us and especially to those we love and who love us than to be “Faithful until Death.”

Death does not have to be feared. It can be welcomed as the friend who is to take us home to God. It can be the final statement of affirming faith to all who know us, that is Paul’s comment in...

1 Cor 15:56-57

11

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; **57** but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Death cannot be stopped, it cannot be avoided, but it can be met with the knowledge of that dark unknown, the future. God has given us all the opportunity to meet death on our terms, not its. Death comes to man as a fearsome thing because man has not prepared to meet it. God gives to His followers the victory over the sting of death. The child of God can face death knowing that it won’t be the separation that the world fears but the joining of the true follower of God with his creator.

Thus another of the elements of Death which is converted from being a terror into a joy is that Death, the separator, becomes to Christ's servants Death, the uniter. We all know how that the function of death is probably the one that frightens us the most. The separation of body and soul removes from us the only existence we have ever known.

There is one last element in Death we want to look at, something that is changed for the Christian, and that is the fact that in general, men have an instinctive recoil from Death, because there is an instinctive suspicion that after Death is the Judgment, and that, somehow or other when a man dies he passes into a state where he will reap the consequences of what he has sown here. But to Christ's servant that last thought is robbed of its sting, and the fears of everything that death holds for man, the Christian can say, “He that died for me makes it possible for me to face death knowing that I shall meet as my Judge my Savior.”

Look at these four contrasts together. **12** **13** Death as a step into a dim unknown versus Death as a step into a region lighted by Jesus; **14** Death as the cessation of earthly activity versus Death as the introduction to nobler opportunities; **15** Death as the separator and isolator versus Death as uniting to Jesus and all His disciples; **16** Death as calling us to the judgment-seat of the adversary versus Death as bringing us to the throne of Christ; and I think we can understand how Christians can say, All things are ours, whether life or death' which leads to a better life. Death does not have to be our enemy, it can be our friend.

Everything we are, our relationship with this world, with this universe, with Christ, with God rests in our belief in the Life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing else that makes these things certain. By His death, the follower is brought life.

Brethren, our choice of faith in God, obedience to Christ, and trust in the word governs whether or not we become victims to this world and it’s God, Satan, or we can embrace God’s creation and welcome death as the great uniter. **17** The universe can work for us or against us and we get to choose which.