

through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57) Paul lived with a courageous, deep-seated conviction that in Jesus' death, burial, and – most importantly – resurrection, that death, hell, sin, and the grave had been defeated.

At the end of our own life on earth we may be fortunate to have a “hallmark moment” death with our family praying and singing hymns around us. But sometimes death comes as a surprising, unwelcomed visitor that even may bring physical pain and relational heartache. A heart attack or car accident can quickly and tragically steal a life away. Whether death comes to us slowly or quickly, whether it comes late in life or way too early, the Bible teaches us that if we are a follower of Jesus, we do not need to fear death.

As we live by God's never-ending love, let us fix our hope on that future grace. Let us live in the light of our future, eagerly waiting to see Jesus face to face sooner or later. We thank God for His never-ending love and God's glorifying grace and we can find that grace through Christ. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. John Wesley experienced a strangely heart-warming experience during a society meeting in Aldersgate. Have you had this kind of experience in your life and faith journey?
2. John Wesley and his Methodist people emphasized “good deaths.” How can we die well NOW on this world?
3. Paul said, “*now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness ... on the day of his (Jesus) return.*” (2 Timothy 4:8) How can we die well THEN on the day we reunite with Jesus and on the day Jesus returns?
4. Our life on this earth will end, but God's never-ending love continues beyond our death. What would be our priority in our lives?

September 30, 2018

A Grace-Full Life (4)

God's Never-Ending Love

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley experienced an explosion of God's grace in his life. He made this notation in his journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and had saved me from the law of sin and death. (The Journal of John Wesley, January 23, 1736 in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), 103)

That night he not only received assurance of his salvation, but also overcame the fear of death. This is the gift of God's glorifying grace. This is God's never-ending love for us that enables us to live and die well.

As we know it, one day our life on this earth will end. But, God's grace will continue even on the other side of the grave. We will live forever with Jesus and all His people from all the nations of the earth and generations of history in the eternal and perfect Kingdom of God, free from the presence and power of sin. We will bring nothing, and we will lack nothing because the God of grace will provide for all of our needs forever.

John Wesley taught the early Methodists to live lives so that they could die “good deaths.” John Wesley himself experienced “good death.” At the moment he was about to meet with God in heaven, John Wesley said to his friends who surrounded his deathbed, “The best of all is God is with us.” He and his Methodist people knew how to die well. So, how can we be like them? How can we die well? Let us suggest two simple yet profound ways.

1. We can die well when we live confidently in Christ NOW.

Dying well is a process that begins on this side of the veil of death as we live fully in Christ. The Apostle Paul demonstrated this well. In Today's text Paul wrote these affectionate words to Timothy: *As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.* (2 Timothy 4:6-7) Paul was not afraid of death.

Hear this truth from Paul: the secret of dying well is living well! Paul lived well. His life had been poured out. He had fought the good fight and finished the race. He was faithful to God. He lived well.

Paul also wrote, *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). His confidence was secure he knew that whether he lived or died, he belonged to Jesus. That gave him great confidence in living. Because he belonged to Jesus in this life, he believed that being with Jesus in the life to come would be even more glorious. That's living well. When our lives belong to Christ on this side of the veil of death, not even death scares us.

One significant way of living confidently in Christ now is to live in Christian community. It's not a stretch to say that if we dislike Christian community on earth, it's going to be a bummer for us in eternity. God lives in eternal community in the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mysteriously live in community.

Another way to live confidently in Christ now is to cultivate holy living. This requires intentional self-examination. Stephen Covey wrote that highly effective people "begin with the end in mind." One of his suggested exercises is to think about yourself at your funeral. What do you want your spouse, roommate, children, friends, and coworkers to say about you? Or as the bumper sticker says, "Live so that your preacher doesn't have to lie about you at your funeral!" Another way of thinking about holy living is to consider what you want your obituary to say. Paul wrote his obituary this way: "I've run the good race and I've fought the good fight. I'm ready to die." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

In his classic book *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World*, Robert Mulholland explains that the book of Revelation is not some coded puzzle to be solved or novel with clues to figure out. He argues that many first-century followers of Jesus would have understood the images of this vision of John the apostle and that the real goal of the book was to help persecuted followers of Jesus gain strength to stay faithful to Jesus in spite of horrific persecution. God's "New Jerusalem" citizens would indeed live within unholy "Fallen Babylon" and could remain faithful to Jesus. So it was an encouragement for followers of the Way to live holy in an unholy world. These first-century Christians had cultivated a way of holy living now so that they could boldly face death whenever it came. They cultivated a life in grace that gave them supernatural confidence.

2. We can die well when we know we will live completely in Christ THEN. As Paul stood confidently in death's doorway, he made a shift in his letter to his spiritual son Timothy from temporal life to life eternal. He wrote: *"And now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing."* (2 Timothy 4:8)

In other words Paul was saying, "On the other side of the door, my son, is waiting the prize of my life. It's the prize of being with God and seeing Jesus face to face again. The last time I saw him was when he met me on the Damascus Road. Then I was a hater of Jesus. That day, Jesus transformed my life. And now I will see him face to face again." Paul knew that heaven and eternity awaited him on the other side of death's veil. It was his reward.

Paul was not only confident in this life but also confident about the next life. He knew that through the thin veil of death he awaited his completeness in Christ. His words to the Corinthians tell us why he was confident: *Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death*