

Death is Not Natural

By Ben Askins

Death is *not* natural. Every cell in our bodies cry out in revulsion against the death of a beloved child, a trusted mentor, or a lifelong companion. In such times, every beat of our own heart pumps fresh pain into our very souls. We weep until we are dehydrated, our bodies becoming wracked with pain that seems to extend beyond this physical realm. We often attempt to numb or at least suppress this pain with stoic thoughts, steeling ourselves against the grief which would occupy every tick of the clock, if we would only let it. Or we turn our attention to simple distractions, mindless amusements which help drown out the screaming fact that the space and time of our own universe has been ripped open. Our laughter has turned to tears. How can this be “the way of all things”?

“Time” is offered as the cure for all wounds. While time may carry us minute-by-minute farther from our present tragedy, we know that it only drives us closer to our own end. We become more aware of our own mortality with every passing breath. Time brings us no lasting relief. It can not.

Stoic indifference is a refuge often sought in an effort to survive grief, but it has its cost. “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” We grow numb and cold to the world around us, never truly living or loving as we once did. The risk of pain is too great and our heart grows thick and calloused. We are alive, but in only a mere biology textbook sense of the term. The pain is gone, but so is the feeling of life. That is the price chosen by many for the survival of suffering and loss. Living, but not truly alive; dying, though not yet dead. Is it really worth it?

Romantic sentimentalism seems to be the other side of the coin. We attempt to convince ourselves that death is “an adventure” or that our loved ones are “in a better place” where we will see them once again, though we have no solid basis for our belief in such things, except maybe our own preference for blind hopefulness over against blind hopelessness. As we create from scratch our own conception of “heaven” we find ourselves growing more and more out of touch with reality. We may even “wear our hearts on our sleeves,” attempting to live life to the fullest, but it is painfully obvious that our hearts have only smiley-face band-aids loosely clinging to the still raw wounds underneath.

The fear and pain of death are not so easily removed.

So where is there to turn, where is there to run, in times of bitterness, sorrow, grief, anguish and tragedy? Where is your only comfort in life *and* in death?

In God’s Word. Look with me for just a moment at the face of God... “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). These are shocking words. If the Bible were a lion, then these words would roar to us about suffering. What could so grieve, so move, the very heart of God?

His face is wracked with pain, his heart is broken and he weeps. The God by whom, for whom and through whom all things were made is weeping openly *at the tomb of His friend*.

If it is our desire to know God's perspective about life (or death), we look to Christ in the New Testament for the answers, because He is the pinnacle of God revealing Himself and His mind to us. Jesus Christ is God in skin, walking on earth, breathing air, even weeping because of the tragedy of death. From this we can at least know that painful eruptions of grief are shamelessly appropriate at such times.

Death is *not* natural, it is not the way things *ought* to be. We know this, deep inside, we know this is true. Death is so very much against "the way of all things," even God Himself weeps because of it... but, unlike us, He is not powerless against it.

We have been made in the image of God, made so that our thoughts, words and actions might reflect to everyone who God is and what He is like. Our hearts are made to love God, our minds to know His wisdom, our eyes to see His beauty, our mouths to speak His truth and worship Him, our bodies meant to serve God. We are made in such a way that nothing but God Himself can satisfy our desires, but we all have lived our entire lives for so much less, for mere entertainment. Many of us live our lives and think as often (and as highly) of God as we think of the carpet in our living rooms. Death is the result of a curse which we have brought upon ourselves through our own unwavering indifference to God and our unshakeable faith in ourselves. Our bodies die because we don't live for the purpose for which we were created. For these things we ought to grieve and weep and mourn.

Yet we look to God and, remarkably, *He weeps as well*. The very heart of the God to whom we are so indifferent is moved to action in our behalf. God comes to earth to die for His people. He comes to earth to remove the curse of death, to receive in His own body the death our lives have deserved. Can you remain indifferent to him?

God suffers. God weeps. God bleeds. God dies.
Resurrection.
God lives.

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (Hebrews 2:14-15) "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

Death is swallowed up in the triumphant victory of Jesus Christ, and *His* victory over death becomes *our* victory over death when we believe Him. This hope of victory over even death itself can be found in no other name than that of Jesus Christ, for there

is no other God but Him. The difference between dying alone and dying while trusting in Christ is like the difference between being run over by a truck and being run over by the shadow of a truck.

Not only does this change the meaning of death for us, it also changes the meaning of life. We are here to use every fiber of our being and every moment of our existence to love and serve and praise the God who died in order to bring us to Himself. Anything in our life, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it all for the glory of God, and when our lives are lived for Christ, even our dying is not a loss, but gain, because then we will see Him face-to-face (1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 1:21; 1 Cor. 13:12). We can know that God is making *all things*, even our struggles, suffering, pain and death, turn out eventually for our own good and for His glory (Romans 8:28) and we can join with all of His people throughout history and all over the world in worshiping Him, because He is truly worthy to be praised (Revelation 5; Rev. 7:9-10).

God Himself says to you this very moment, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Your answer to that question will affect every aspect of your life, even unto death.

Question: What is your only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yes, that all things must be secondary to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, from now on, to live for him. (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 1)