

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 61

Recently we heard (and maybe in the bath sang!) **‘Silent night, holy Night...’**. It set our thoughts on the night of the Lord’s birth, the stable and the shepherds. But there were other ‘silent nights’, they also were ‘holy nights’. I mean the nights when our Lord, born in a manger, lay buried in a borrowed tomb. His birth, death and resurrection go together. Without his death his birth would achieve nothing. Without his resurrection his death would achieve nothing. Together they achieved our salvation.

Each day we are confronted with death. The fact, and maybe fear, of death intrudes into our thoughts. We hear statistics of death, alarming statistics – but maybe these starting numbers do not startle us. It’s possible to become immune to numbers, charts and tables. But death itself is another matter.

I’ve taken time to ask myself, what do I really think about death? Well, I’d be foolish not to ask myself that question. ‘What do I think of death?’

We are told, *‘that by the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone’*. He experienced the full force of death. He didn’t merely glance at death but he felt its full impact. This was not for himself, but for our sakes. So *‘that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death’*. (Hebrews 2.14-15)

Behind death is the dark power of evil, ‘the fear of death’. This is our natural reaction to death – we fear it. Remember the hymn of William Williams? ‘...when I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside’. This fear, the fear of death, this anxious fear, is bondage, slavery. But by his death the Lord Jesus destroyed death. That same hymn becomes a prayer to Jesus: ‘death of death, and hell’s destruction, land me safe on Canaan’s side!’

So what, in the light of these truths, should be my response to death? The Apostle Paul will give me the answer: *‘I am hard put between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain here is best for you’*. (Philippians 1.23-24)

To *‘depart and be with Christ is far better’*. Here was a man for whom death held no fear. This deepest, most natural human fear had been overcome. He triumphed over this fear. Perfect love had cast out fear.

But, as Christian people, it’s possible to move even further away from fear than this. Fear can be replaced by something stronger than fear and stronger even than the absence of fear. Through Christ, his promises and

his victory we may have not only no fear but a tremendous hope, a confidence.

Paul was '*persuaded that neither life nor death could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus*'. Death had lost its sting. Death is personal – it is God's personal invitation into his presence.

Paul says '*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*'. He knew he must go through a transformation. His lowly body must be replaced by a glorious body. Paul thinks of himself as the 'chief of sinners' and the 'least of saints'. He knew he carried around 'a body of death'. He says he must be 'rescued' from such a body. St John tells us how this will happen: '*My loved ones, now we are children of God, and at present it is not clear what we are to be. But we are certain that when he appears we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*'. (1 John 3.2)

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, Paul will be changed. He has this confidence. And this confidence has overwhelmed the fear of death. Like old Simeon, he has a peace that's triumphant over fear: '*Lord now you are letting your servant depart in peace.*'

It is this promise and expectation that moves us beyond fear. Death for the child of God becomes a *privilege* – a *privileged personal invitation* from Christ the King, from Jesus our Saviour and Friend, into the beauty and glory and peace of his presence. A personal invitation that comes to us on the wings of love – *to see him as he is, to know as we are known, to see him face to face*. This sense of *privilege* may fill our hearts and transform our minds.

Finish then Thy new creation:
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
till in Heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!