

The Same Fate but Two Diametrically Opposite Responses

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Heb. 9:27)

Perhaps no one ever feared death quite like Thomas Donaldson who was afflicted with brain cancer in 1990. Hoping that science can one day make immortality possible, Donaldson, then 46, asked the California court judge to permit cryogenic specialists to freeze him, and then sever his frozen head to store it for the future. He hoped that someday science would provide a cure for cancer, but for this plan to succeed, the doctors would also have to master the technique of brain transplantation. Only then could Donaldson's head be thawed out and his brain implanted to another body. At \$35,000, freezing a head was a good deal cheaper than it cost to freeze an entire body for \$100,000. Had he saved up \$65,000 more, theoretically he would have needed just one miracle, but he was facing death needing two! "I am dying," said the cancer patient, adding, "I might later be revived and continue to live." Fortunately, he managed to beat the disease until finally succumbing to it in 2006.

The question of "How would you approach your own death one day?" is especially morbid for Westerners, yet it ought to be raised intermittently lest we bet our house money on desperate measures such as brain transplantation to another body. Now compare Donaldson's distressed attitude toward death with that of the following man whose daughter recounted his fateful visit to the doctor's office when his world came to a halting stop. She said: "On Oct. 15th last month, my dad was told he had cancer and his life expectancy was about 3 months. I will never forget how my dad responded to his devastating news. As shocked as he was since he never expected this kind of result, and yet the first thing dad told the doctor in broken English was:

'You say cancer, I say no problem. I like Jesus Christ. God blessed my life, I go when God calls.' And then my dad pointed at the Hindu doctor and said, 'You Jesus Christ.' I looked at the doctor thinking maybe he was a bit offended by what my dad had just told him, but all he could say was that he was happy to be here, to be in the moment with us because people generally do not respond this way with this kind of devastating news."

Well, that was my father who went to be with the Lord on November, 2007, and even though I had my issues with him growing up, I am so proud of him for showing me how to die, gracefully.

As Christians, should we have the same kind of fear that gripped Donaldson? Certainly Apostle Paul, like my father, didn't. Thinking on the subject, he wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil 1:21-23). He looked forward to dying (while serving the Lord diligently—Phil. 1:25), only because it was the doorway to be with Christ, forever! Where did his confidence come from? It came from his firm belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for he wrote: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and . . . your faith is futile. . . . If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Cor. 15:14-20). That's why Paul, staring death in the face, was able to declare, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). Little did I know that my own father, who came to the Lord rather late in his life, was the one who was going to show what these verses really meant!

Spirituality: Facing Death

But this readiness needs to be cultivated while we are still living. My father once told me of an elder whom he greatly respected who died kicking and screaming, that he didn't want to die. Disappointed by his reaction, that incident caused my father to mentally and spiritually prepare for his own departure. One way of preparation was to become more generous. This makes sense since we cannot take anything out of the world (1 Tim. 6:7^b). Moments before my dad passed away, with the help of my sister, he wrote out two checks: one for his final tithing and another for a special thanksgiving offering. That wasn't all. When I arrived for the funeral, my mom handed me a white envelope from my dad, with \$1000 inside. My mom said, "Your dad knows that you spent a lot of money to get here from Mexico on a moment's notice." Suffice it to say, my father had prepared well for his departure; let's reflect upon how we should prepare for ours. What are some things we cling on to so dearly that we should let go, now?

Further Reflection

1. Describe how Paul approached his impending death by execution (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18).
2. Describe how Jesus approached his earthly death (Lk. 22:39-46, Jn. 17:1-19)

Bible Reading

Friday	Proverbs 30	Isaiah 60
Saturday	Proverbs 31	Isaiah 61
Sunday	Psalms 23	2 Corinthians 5

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