

An Easter Meditation

The ancient Latin poet Horace wrote: "Pale Death knocks with impartial foot at poor men's hovels and kings' palaces." No one can escape death. When the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw had completed a detailed study on the causes of death, he said that he had come to only one firm conclusion: one out of one dies. Yet the startling fact is that today, so many try to avoid thinking about the reality of death. Death is treated as a kind of obscenity. A modern preacher observed: "If the nineteenth century tried to conceal the facts of life, the twentieth century tries to conceal the fact of death." We use a whole list of phrases to shield us from the brutal fact of death. We speak about the "departed," the "deceased," "the loved one," or "he is no longer with us." And there is a shift from funeral services to memorial services, celebrating the life of the departed. One reason for this trend is the fact that fewer people believe in the life hereafter. Many say, "This life is the only one we will ever have. Therefore, live it with gusto and go for it as long as we can." As George Burns argues, the way to make it to the age of 100 or more "is to be sure to make it to 99;" for he suggests, "with a good positive attitude and a little bit of luck, there's no reason you can't live to be 100. Once you've done that you've really got it made, because very few people die over 100." Whether we accept the fact or not, we all have to go the way of all flesh.

Why do so many try so hard to cover up the reality of death? Why does the Bible speak of people being "held in slavery by their fear of death?" (Hebrews 2:15) There are some obvious answers to these questions. For some it is fear of the great unknown. Others fear that they may have to give an account of all what they have done and said before the Judge of all the earth. When British racing driver Stirling Moss was at the height of his career, he told a newspaper reporter, "I am frightened of death, I know it means going to meet one's Maker, and one shouldn't be afraid of that. But I am." Moss was not talking religion, he was expressing the inner instinct of fear.

How do we face death? The Bible teaches that "Death has been swallowed up in victory." When Scripture affirms that "Christ died for our sins," it speaks of the God-man who yielded himself voluntarily to death." Jesus said, "No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:18) But the crucified One could not behold in death. This is the good news. The Christ, who died and was buried, was raised on the third day. The resurrection of Jesus is neither literary fiction nor a myth. It is a glorious fact. Jesus' resurrection bears witness that one dramatic exception is Jesus of Nazareth. The first major fact supporting the resurrection of Christ is the empty tomb. This fact has never been refuted. Another fact is the appearances of Christ after the resurrection. He appeared to over 500 eyewitnesses at a single time. (I Corinthians 15:6) Christ's resurrected body was even touched on two occasions. (Matthew 28:9; John 20:17) And another proof of the resurrection is the radical transformation of Christ's disciples. Before the resurrection, they acted as cowards. They fled from

the crucifixion scene. After the resurrection, they became heroes of the faith. Despite intense persecution and the threat of death they testified to the truth of the resurrection. And even today lives are being transformed. People still find in Christ forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Death has been overcome. Because Christ lives we will live also. The evidence supporting the Christian hope for their resurrection from the dead is Christ's resurrection. And this is His invitation: "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)

Christians are realists. They know that death comes to all. But they also know Him who came from the other side of death to tell His followers: "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Revelation 1:18).