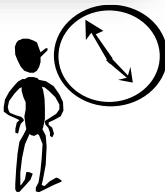


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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45th Birthday

By Matthew W. Bassford

Today is my 45th birthday, a time for reflection if ever there was one. From an earthly perspective, this is a grim milestone indeed. It is almost certainly the last birthday I will ever celebrate.

When I was in elementary school, I learned about Huntingdon's chorea, what they call Huntingdon's disease these days. It is another genetic disease that causes death in middle age. I well remember the thrill of horror that went through me at the thought of dying so untimely.

Ironic, that.

Indeed, from that same worldly perspective, my life must appear blighted, even cursed. How awful it must be to be deprived of the decades that on some level, all of us believe are our birthright! How unfair!

Actually, I feel none of those things. Even though ALS is not the only disaster that has overtaken me, I have lived a life rich with joy and meaning. I am satisfied with my 45 years.

I attribute this entirely to the grace of God and to my decision to seek Him throughout my life. As every Christian feels compelled to note, I have not done so perfectly. Nonetheless, I have spent my life sowing to the Spirit instead of to the flesh, seeking to love God and others above myself.

Even now, some of the fruits of this decision have become obvious. I frequently find myself astonished by the depth of the love that others express toward me. There are even a few people who say of me that I saved their lives. I have had my enemies, it is true, but they are far outnumbered by my devoted brethren and friends. I can say with confidence that if one must die at 45, this is the best way to spend those 45 years.

In fact, I detect another proof of the existence of God

here. Self-sacrificing love is not merely a behavioral quirk that runs counter to the self-ish imperatives of evolution. Rather, it is the way that we are designed to live. Fish are designed to swim, birds are designed to fly, and humans are designed to love.

Despite our steadfast efforts to find fulfillment in anything and everything but love, the endless variations of human existence bear witness to this truth. People never find enduring contentment and happiness by putting themselves first. Instead, the happiest are those who put others above themselves, and this is true even outside a Christian context. Love is not always love, but agape is always agape.

In a random, pitiless universe, why would this be? What natural force would create creatures that find their highest expression in surrendering themselves for others? The enduring greatness of love must point us to God.

All of this is not only the way that I have lived successfully. It is the way that all of you must live if you want to live successfully. Yes, it is possible for the atheist humanitarian to find a measure of fulfillment, but their lives are always an uncompleted equation, a 2+2 endlessly crying out for 4. If love, therefore God. If God, therefore the hope of resurrection and an eternity of love.

Complete the equation. If you're the kind of Christian who goes to church and keeps your nose clean, it's time to become something more. It's time to get down into the muck and start serving and loving others, even when it's hard, even when you don't find them lovable.

If you are in a season in which you are bearing the burdens of love, perhaps as you care for someone like me, do not grow weary! I have been through such seasons in my own life, when each new day seemed unendurable. They do not last, but the bone-deep joy of having served does.

If you aren't living this way at all, I think that probably you have sensed the emptiness of your life already. No amount of earthly success and honor can fill the vacancy where God intended love to dwell. I would imagine that it is hard to dedicate yourself to agape if you are not used to the habit already. It's like trying to learn to ride a bike as an adult—lots of fear, clumsiness, and crashes.

However, someday you will be where I am, and in that day, either you will have a life of the love of Christ to look back on, or you won't. The former makes even death endurable. The latter makes even life unbearable.

Dying for Jesus

By Matthew W. Bassford

These days, it seems like people in our country are increasingly being led astray by a godless, secular mindset. This worldview has a lot of superficial appeal. After all, if there is no God, you don't have to submit to anybody. You can do whatever you want

with whomever you want. The world is your oyster!

However, this apparent freedom comes at a steep cost. The unrestrained life is also a meaningless life because pleasure is ultimately empty. Even the goals and ideals of the worldly are unable to provide meaning.

This is most obvious in their failure to address life's most consequential events. What, for instance, is marriage to the irreligious? It does not consecrate a relationship that otherwise would be sinful. At most, it offers a tax break.

The problem is even worse when it comes to death. If a life without God is meaningless, death is the ultimate in meaninglessness. It is the squashing of the human cockroach beneath the boot of the random universe.

Outside of edge cases, like dying for one's country, no earthly philosophy can mitigate the horror of this fate. Take, for instance, sexual autonomy, which is the great secular religion of our day. You can spend your life promoting LGBTQ causes. You can celebrate Pride Month with the fervor of a medieval Catholic celebrating Christmas.

However, sexual autonomy offers no way to engage with death. When you get that terminal diagnosis, it marks an end to your promoting and celebrating. You can't advance the cause by dying. Your philosophy gives you no hope. Everything for which you have lived will perish with you.

Things are utterly different for the Christian. Worldly ideologies crumble in the face of suffering and death. However, the suffering and death of Christ is the central event of our religion. Indeed, we view discipleship as a continual dying to self. In our hymns, we regularly anticipate our coming deaths.

Consequently, it is in the presence of suffering and death that Christianity is most powerful. They cannot overwhelm the meaning of our existence. Rather, our faith endows even death with extraordinary meaning and significance.

Consider, for instance, the language of John 21:19. Jesus has just finished predicting that Peter would be arrested and executed by the enemies of the gospel. John comments that Jesus said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. He does not say that Jesus said this to indicate that Peter's death would glorify God.

The distinction is subtle but profound. Peter will die a martyr's death, but he does not have to die a martyr's death for his death to be God-glorifying. Rather, any death that Peter dies will glorify God, provided that Peter remains faithful.

What is true for Peter is true for any Christian, and it gives me great purpose now that I have received my terminal diagnosis. I will surely die, just as Peter surely would, but if I am steadfast, my death will glorify God as his death did.

Thanks to the public nature of my illness, I have received innumerable cards and expressions of support from my brethren. Among those that I most treasure are the ones that come from relatives of Christians who already have died from ALS. These relatives describe how their loved one remained cheerful and kind in the face of despair, how

they shone with the light of faith, and how they encouraged others to follow after them.

These are deaths that glorify God. I can give no higher praise.

As I am dying, I strive to do the same. I seek to bless, encourage, and inspire. I exalt the One who is giving me the hope of eternal life, and I urge others to come to Him too. Death can bring my body low, but my faith and my Lord are greater than it is. Death is vast and unconquerable when compared to any earthly ideal, but next to Christ it is nothing. Even as my flesh fails, I regard it with contempt.

Do this also. When your time comes and you die, die so as to glorify God. Whether you die as a martyr before thousands of scoffing pagans in the Colosseum or in front of a few family and friends, glorify God in your death. It will be the last earthly service that you can offer Him. It may be the greatest.

Why Death?

By Doy Moyer

Why is death a consequence of sin? Because sin is a direct affront to the glory of the God of life. When we reject God, we reject life. Death is what's left. We cannot turn our backs on life and expect to live.

Why did Christ come to die? He died for us to demonstrate power over death and provide life. This is why resurrection is so critical to the gospel message. Through death and resurrection, He proclaims victory over death, redeems us from the curse of sin (i.e., death), remakes us in His image as His new creation brought back to life, and reconciles us to God since death would no longer separate us from the One in whom is life. *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4).

This empowers us to live for Him.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (II Corinthians 5:14-15).

"I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:17-18).

"Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (I Corinthians 15:57).

The Twisted Thinking of Abortion

By Dennis Abernathy

The thinking of many in our society is truly twisted. Consider the case where two little boys, who were reported kidnapped in South Carolina. Actually, the mother of those little boys confessed to murdering them. She was involved with a man who wanted her company, but not her children, so she murdered them. I know you are thinking, as I was: “How could a mother do such a hideous thing?” Such a mindset is truly twisted. I’m sure many good people would have gladly taken her little boys if she didn’t want them. But instead of showing the “natural affection” of a mother, or even giving her children to others, that young mother chose to murder her two little boys. 2 Timothy 3:3 speaks of people being “without natural affection.” It is natural for parents to love their children, and for children to love their parents. Some translations have “hard-hearted,” “inhuman,” “callous,” and “unloving.” The conduct displayed by that mother was certainly unloving, hard-hearted, inhuman, callous, and void of natural affection! It is a reminder of the twisted thinking of the pro-choice mindset.

Have you stopped to reflect on how this mother would have been praised and defended if she had just killed her children earlier in an abortion clinic before they were born? In fact, if she had just decided to kill her children earlier, there are some people who even think the government should have helped her pay for the process.

People who are opposed to abortion are portrayed as terrible people because they are against what is called “a mother’s choice.” But what about this mother’s choice to kill her small children? Who thinks it’s a bad thing to be against her freedom of choice to do that? Think about it. From the pro-abortion perspective, this woman’s mistake was not killing her children sooner. If she had done that before their births by abortion she would have been hailed as a courageous, liberated woman. It is sad, but we are living in a twisted society where even many mothers have been conditioned to think first and above all else about their own interests and convenience, regardless of the cost to others.

Just remember this, those two little boys didn’t have a choice, did they?

