

## **God Humbles Death**

By: Keith Keyser

I must say that I am sick of death. During the past two weeks, a prominent Northern Irish Bible teacher whom I know of succumbed to cancer. Another brother I know personally departed this life suddenly last week, shocking his friends by his sudden exit from this world. This past Sunday a sister in the Lord lost her father to a recently diagnosed illness. Meanwhile, a dear brother in our home church is gravely ill with multiple maladies that could take his life at any moment. Serious diseases plague more than one personal friend, as well as a close family member. All of this leads me to strongly reiterate: I am sick of death. Thankfully in light of the work of Christ, death is a temporary phenomenon.

### **“Nothin’ Certain But Death”**

Dr. Edwin Shneidman, a psychologist & authority on suicide once said: “Dying is the one thing — perhaps the only thing — in life that you don’t have to do...Stick around long enough and it will be done for you.”<sup>1</sup> Death is the terrible consequence of sin in this world. The gravity of the situation is famously described in the New Testament: “The wages of sin is death...” and “...sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (Rom. 6:23; Jms. 1:15.) Sin’s ugliness is seen in the havoc it produces in men’s lives – the perverted hearts, wrecked marriages, and ravaged bodies and minds which it leaves in its wake. Its heinousness is demonstrated on a thousand battlefields and its pervasiveness is seen on the sick beds of the rich and poor alike. Loathed and feared by humans of all walks of life, Death reveals the seriousness and harmfulness of sin.

It is well that it is so terrible, for sin is independence of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. In its essence it is rebellion against the Almighty. Its true face is seen by the first temptation in human history: humans can be divine (Gen. 3:5.) When one turns away from Him, one leaves the source of light and life (Jn. 1:3-4.) What is more, if someone dies in their sin they are eternally cut off from these things – a tragic state called “the second death” (Rev. 20:6, 14.) This spiritual alienation afflicts all people who have not been born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and will endure for eternity unless they repent (Eph. 2:1; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; Jude 13.) In order to be transferred “from death to life” one must have his sins removed by the work of the Christ (Jn. 5:24.)

### **An Obituary For Death**

The exhilarating truth of death’s demise is seen in the effects of Christ’s victorious death. The seventeenth century metaphysical poet, John Donne’s oft-quoted words sum this up well:

“DEATH be not proud, though some have called thee Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so, For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow, Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.”

He finishes his meditation exulting: "...death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die."<sup>ii</sup>

In fact, death has already been mortally wounded. It is on borrowed time, and is a vanquished relic of the fallen earth's past. By His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus paid for sin entirely, suffering the penalty and satisfying the righteous requirement of God. He tasted death for everyone (Heb. 2:9.) Three days later He rose from the dead, proving that His sacrifice was accepted, vindicating His claims, and demonstrating His victory over the grave, death, and hell (Acts 2:22-33; Rom. 1:4.) When Christ returns, His people who have died will rise to meet Him in the air. Those who are still physically alive at that time will also be caught to be with Him forever (1 Thes. 4:13-18.) The Christian's triumph is best summarized in these taunting lyrics: "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55.)

HIS be the Victor's name  
Who fought the fight alone;  
Triumphant saints no honour claim,  
His conquest was their own.

By weakness and defeat,  
He won the meed and crown;  
Trode all our foes beneath His feet  
By being trodden down.

He Satan's power laid low;  
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;  
**Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,  
And death by dying slew.**

Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,  
Slain in His victory;  
Who lived, who died, who lives again ---  
For thee, His church, for thee!<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Edwin Shneidman, Authority on Suicide, Dies at 91" on [nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) May 21, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/us/21shneidman.html?partner=rss&emc=rss> Accessed on 3/16/10.

<sup>ii</sup> John Donne, "Divine Sonnet X: Death be not proud"; the differences in spelling are original with Donne. Accessed on 3/16/10 at <http://www.bartleby.com/105/72.html> .

<sup>iii</sup> S. Whitlock Gandy, "His Be The Victor's Name," *Spiritual Songs*, Hymn #24: <http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/ss/24> Accessed on 3/16/10. Emphasis mine.

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