A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE & DEATH
(In loving memory of Mrs Rose Tow and Ms Tow Soon Ai who went home to be with the Lord on 4 Aug and 6 Aug 05 respectively)

Introduction

Death is but a door and departure to somewhere better for the believer. Paul says in 2 Tim 4:6-8, For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. In a sense, when a believer leaves this world in physical death, he or she will enter into everlasting life with God in heaven. In John 11:24,25, Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: Believest thou this? As Paul correctly says, absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8-9).

There is much spiritual comfort and solace for the people of God when they experienced grief and bereavement (2 Cor 1:4). Our English word “comfort” comes from two Latin words that together mean “with strength.” The Holy Spirit is called the “Comforter” because He strengthens and enables us to handle the challenges facing us. The Greek word translated “Comforter” (the Holy Spirit) means “one called alongside to help”. There is much comfort for the people of God when they go through the doldrums of life. Consider the following thoughts on death and living given below.

Consolation for the Bereaved

In a Christian funeral, there is a place of hope, comfort and peace for the bereaved family, unlike the unregenerate dead. Though there is short-term pain and grief, yet we have the everlasting consolation of the Holy Spirit that is stronger than any temporal loss. Ps 116:15 says, Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints and Rev 14:13, And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. Because of the resurrection of Christ, we who are in Christ have the blessed hope and expectation of the resurrection of our bodies to be reunited with our spirit one day too. 1 Cor 15:57 says, But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the Christian needs not be afraid of death, but be courageous to believe trust in the Lord when the day of death approaches. We are to be ready to leave this world to be with Christ eternally, anytime (2 Cor 5:7-9).
A Triumphant Homegoing

Christians can strive to both begin and end well on this side of eternity. Consider the following thoughts of meaningful meditation (adapted from Lockyer, *Last Words of Saints & Sinners*) before death for the redeemed:-

1. Remember that God will not forsake us in our grievous agonies.
2. Look upon God as the merciful and faithful Father and trust in His infinite goodness.
3. Meditate continually upon the **atonning death** and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ and trust the merit of His vicarious atonement on the Cross.
4. Meditate often upon the Lord Jesus Christ on His substitutionary death for us.
5. Meditate on the **victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ** over death and hell.
6. Meditate on the **ascension of Jesus Christ** into heaven and His sitting at the right hand of God.
7. Meditate on our inseparable union with Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit and the fruits of His blessed immortality upon us.
8. Consider that death delivers us from all temporal evils that we daily suffer.
9. Consider that death delivers us from sin, into a life of victory in the heavenlies and from the remains of our corruption.
10. Meditate on the **glory and happiness of our souls** at their departure out of the body one day.
11. Meditate on the **resurrection of our bodies** to be reunited with soul one day.
12. Meditate on the **destruction of death** and the eternal and most blessed life, which we shall enjoy, both in soul and body after our resurrection with the saints.

Bishop Ken, the author of the Doxology taught us to sing:

Teach me to live that I may dread,
The grave as little as my bed.
Teach me to die, that so I may,
Rise glorious at the Judgment Day.

Last Words of Dying Men

Consider the following parting words of sinners and saints on their death bed:-

The last words of people gave us a clue on where they will spend eternity. The 18th century French infidel and philosopher, Voltaire's last words were, **"I am abandoned by God and man. I shall go to Hell. I wish I'd never been born."** How different were the words of the 19th century American evangelist DL Moody: **"Earth is receding. Heaven is opening. It is my Coronation day."** The final words of people on their death beds gave us the summary of their lives. On his deathbed, Jay Gould, 19th Century American industrialist, financier and one of the richest men in the world, summed up his life this way: **"I am the most miserable devil on earth."** By contrast, the Apostle Paul, a first
century evangelist and church planter, viewed his life with thankfulness to God this way and was ready for his departure for heaven any time” (see 2 Tim 4:4-8). [Quoted from *Grace & Truth Magazine*, March 2004].

**Christ, the Answer to Death**

Without God’s grace and without saving faith in Christ alone, it is impossible to save oneself from death and the consequences of sin. Make it our first rule, therefore, to confess our sins and ask God to save us from our manifold transgressions. Pray that He will redeem our souls and enlighten us to do His will and strengthen us on the remembrance of death and the life to come. One would do well to remember Ps 51, 90 and 121; the Psalms of penitence and great solace. Run to Christ Crucified and behold His loving kindness: He willingly was crucified and died in order to save His people from their sins. If we run to Him with a contrite and broken heart and repent of our sins, He will help and pardon us. Just think how graciously He forgave the thief on the cross. Therefore repent and believe Christ, who will also forgive us of our sins, for it (1 John 1:9) was for our sake that He shed His precious Blood on Calvary’s cross.

**Basis of Consolation - The Resurrection of Christ**

If we believe in the Bible and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Old and New Testament; What significance then does the resurrection has for us in the terms of spiritual comfort and eternal life?

1. **In the resurrection of Jesus Christ we see the clear demonstration of the power of the true God.** Eph 1:19-21 tells us that it is the power of our heavenly Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
2. **The resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is God.** That is exactly what God the Father wanted to communicate to us, as we read in Rom 1:4. The Jews crucified Jesus Christ. To them, He was blaspheming when He said that He was the Son of God, which made Him equal to the Father. The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates the truth who He claimed He was for only God can triumph over death.
3. **Our salvation depends on our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** In Rom 10:9, we are told how to be saved. It says that “if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” This means that you cannot be a Christian unless you believe in the deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
4. **The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates to us that all the teachings of Jesus Christ are true.** Everything Jesus taught was true, including His great promise in John 6:40, *Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* Jesus’ teachings concerning His person, work, heaven, hell and the future judgment are all true.
5. **The resurrection of Jesus Christ secured our justification.** Christ died for our sins and He was raised for our justification, Paul says in Rom 4:25, *Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*
6. **Our own resurrection depends completely on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Read 1 Thess 4:14: *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* There are other verses concerning this, including 2 Cor 4:14.
7. **The power for our Christian life in the present is the power of His**
resurrection. We read about this in Eph 1:19-21 and Rom 6:4: *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* “How can we live this Christian life?” We can live it by the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates that He is the appointed judge of all the wicked people in the world. In Acts 17:31, Paul told the Athenians, *For he [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.* We see the same idea in John 5:22 where Jesus said, *Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. In verses 27-29 He continued, And he has given him authority to judge, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will rise; those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that He will raise up the elect to eternal life and Jesus Christ will be the righteous Judge of all one day.

The Christian Expectation

**The infallible and inspired Word of God teaches eternal hope and assurance beyond the grave.** The Christian needs not fear death for death is but a door to heaven where God is and we shall ever be with the Lord. There is no annihilation of souls or purgatory or reincarnation as taught by some; the Bible says clearly in Heb 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.* The doctrine of resurrection is mentioned as early as in the Old Testament. Job mentioned that in his flesh, he would see God (after he passed away). In Job 19:26, we read, *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.* Job believed it by faith, trusting in the Lord and that faith will be turned into sight one day. The Apostle Paul quipped in 2 Cor 5:1-2 *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.*

When Jesus resurrected from the death as recorded in Matt 28, even His disciples initially were shocked but later accepted the glorious fact. More than 500 witnessed the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:5–6). **This testimony to attest to the historic past would be legally admissible in court by any judicial standards anywhere.** Doubting Thomas wanted to conduct his empirical experiment, but he later believed the authenticity of the resurrection of Christ, acknowledged Him wholeheartedly (John 20:24-28). When Paul shared the gospel with the Athenians, the central thrust was the resurrection factor. Acts 17:31 says, *Because he hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Some Greek philosophers believed and some doubted.

The prophet Elijah actually resurrected the dead boy of a widow in Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17–24). Elisha also resurrected a young boy of a certain widow in
Israel, who came back to life after Elisha’s persevering prayers to the Lord (2 Kgs 4:32–36). When Jesus resurrected Lazarus, it was the talk of the town, for the people had never seen anything like this before (John 11). Paul raised Eutychus from his death (he fell during his preaching and was dead), the people marvelled and were amazed. These are the signs of the true Apostles in 2 Cor 12:12, Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. But the gospel of the risen Jesus is still the power of God unto salvation as Rom 1:16 says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

One day, all genuine believers will also experience the glorious resurrection of their bodies. Paul said in 1 Thess 4:14–18, For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

These are words of great spiritual comfort for the bereaved family at the funeral service or graveyard for the believer who has gone home to the Lord. So we have the assurance of hope and we do not despair when someone dies in Christ. Although humanly speaking, we are grieved, yet we know that the redeemed dead is going to a better place and that we who are in Christ will see him or her again (John 14:1-3). Paul reiterated in 1 Cor 15:53–55, For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Our last enemy is death. Men on their own, have no victory over it. Recently there was an article in The Straits Times about a 114 year old Japanese lady who shared her secret of long life. While man may try to prolong life, death is inevitable. It is a matter of time whether we are younger or older. So Moses said in Ps 90:12, So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

The author visited the Choa Chu Kang Christian cemetery recently and walked through the many Christian graves, some of which he knew personally. For Christians, we will never see one another for the last time for we have an everlasting hope based on the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. We have a message of eternal life beyond the grave that no other religion has. Jesus Christ has proven it by His resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–6). There is an empty garden tomb that is in Jerusalem, not a grave of dead bones. “Because He lives, we can face tomorrow and life is worth the living just because he lives," that is the hymn-writer’s and our assurance and testimony of our Lord Jesus.

We can trust in Christ because He has triumphed over the grave, hell and
death once and for all; and anyone who believes in Him will also be saved and be victorious. As Jesus in John 11:25–26, says, *I am the resurrection, and the life over death: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* **Believest thou this?**

**Conclusion**

**Are you ready for heaven?** It is a joy to be with the Lord forever where there is no more sea which means metaphorically that there is no separation, change, mystery, sorrow, death, pain or tears but eternal bliss with the saints forevermore (Rev 21:1,4-5). May the God of living give to all present the blessed readiness and the deep sense of spiritual comfort and solace especially to the bereaved family as we look up to Christ, our risen Saviour, the Author and Finisher of our lives to complete this race of life on earth victoriously in due course.

Every time we attend a Christian funeral, we are soberly reminded of God’s wonderful words of comfort to the living and as an evangelical message to the unbelievers at the vigil service or burial grounds. **The Christian faith is about the abundant, meaningful life and life forever because of the resurrection of Christ, without which we are of all men most miserable (1 Cor 15:19).** Do you have this eternal hope and peace of heart and mind today? **Are you assured of your eternal destiny?** Only come to Jesus today and be saved from damnation with true evangelical repentance from our sins. Let us humbly seek the Lord Jesus as our Saviour while He may be found before it is too late (2 Cor 6:2). **Without Christ it is a hopeless end, with Christ it is an endless hope.** Praise God for these words of spiritual comfort and truth which strengthen the afflicted family, who seek to honour Christ in both life and death.

Jack Sin

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**Awakened Out of Spiritual Slumber**

For many years I have stumbled, backslided and strayed from God. I was so taken up with my studies and ambitions of advancement in my medical career that I have neglected to give thanks and praise to God for His blessings and give Him all the glory. And because of some minor setbacks, failures and disappointment, I was disillusioned with life itself. However, in all those years there was never a moment of unbelief.

I was lost and acknowledged that only the power and grace of God working in me can help. Only God can regenerate and revive me spiritually. God saw me in the rut and wanted me to get out of it. By His prevenient grace God sought me first and this kind of message indicates that God has been precious in my life. Every believer is conscious throughout life of many failings which need the mercy of the Lord. We are upheld by the constant grace of God in forgiveness.

Change came about by my repentance. God pardons and forgives and made that sweeping reformation and restoration in me. I must therefore work for Him so that He can work in me. I must worship Him and be committed to Him and so be separated from the world. I must be a witness for Him and to testify for Him, to the saving of soul.
All that happened when I was in the USA about six years ago. I sought a Church that preaches the truth in doctrine and practice, a Church that brings honour to Christ and one which is after Christ's own heart. The Church that I attended was similar to our Maranatha BP Church. There was a beautiful simplicity about the Church. There was radiant Christian love among the people, a feeling of humble reverence and an air of joyous informality. Just like the Maranathan congregation, everyone was willing to serve. After all, the Church is not an entity in itself. It is a body of individuals united in Christ but having separate individual responsibilities serving God together.

I attended Maranatha BP Church where I listened to the Word of God sincerely preached and where the sacraments are administered to, according to Christ’s institution. Maranatha is certainly the Church of God where the preaching and teaching of the Word is seen in truth and clarity and where the sacraments are faithfully upheld. The Word preached in all its purity feeds the congregation with spiritual nourishment and whatever is needed for salvation and sanctification. The pure celebration of the sacraments confirms our faith in the Word.

I find the Wednesday night prayer meetings to be a great blessing for the Church members. Prayer has power because it brings the believers into oneness with the operation of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God wants us to have a spirit of prayer, to be in His presence as He invites us to draw upon His resources. In praying we learn to depend on God, rest in Him and have His full assurance in providing our needs. We need to receive all His blessings with true gratitude as we remember in prayer that everything comes from Him. It is therefore in our interests to be constantly in prayer and attending the Wednesday night prayer meetings regularly.

The Church corporate prayer meetings also give the Church an opportunity for members to fellowship with one another. In this fellowship, members share with one another, encourage, support one another and edify each other. We need others' prayers and others need our prayers too. The meeting starts with a song of praise to the Lord followed by devotion. We spend much time in the studying of the Word of the Lord. The Word is the necessary food for health and joy in our spiritual lives. For now and young believers the Word is “the sincere milk”. For the grounded and rooted believer, the Word is ‘the strong meat’ to further strengthen their faith. The Scriptures also provide daily guidance for those who will use their directions. *Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet; and a light unto my path* (Ps 119:105).

Dr Koh Thong San

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At the Pulpit

Theme for the Quarter:

“The Biblical Way to True Happiness”

Rev (Dr) Jack Sin

Happy are the Holy

(Matt 5:8)

*These hyperlinks work with Word 97 and later version.

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