

The End of Death

Revelation 21:3-4

Sunday, October 15, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction

I remember visiting a woman who was in hospice and knew that she did not have long to live. Well into her 90's, her heart had become weak and all medical science could do was keep her comfortable as she lived her last days. Strong in Christ, she referred to her impending death as her home-going and looked forward to loved ones she would see again, including her beloved husband who had passed tens years prior. Her grown children visited her often and she remained gracious and at peace until she passed away. She had long before made all the necessary arrangements for her funeral and final financial matters, so none of that was a burden to her family. I admired her and, in a way, envied her because she had died as she lived, strong, loving, at peace with her loved ones and with the Lord. Her attitude echoed the words of 1 Corinthians 15:55, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" She lived out the promise found at the end of the Bible.

Set the stage

The Apostle John, imprisoned on a miserable rock of an island called Patmos and forced to work in the salt mine there, has a vision of God, the future and eternity that he committed to paper and is now the Book of Revelation. In it are many promises, but for today I want to ponder just one, a most important one at the end of the book that dares to declare that even death will come to an end.

Revelation 21:3-4 (NKJV)

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

tabernacle

There is so much to consider in this passage; a promise that God will be with them and be their God-something that echoes all the way back to Genesis, that He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there will be no more pain or suffering, for the old things have passed away. By the way, that same phrase, "old things have passed away," is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that describes the spiritual state of new life for the follower of Christ.

For now, let's just look at the promise that says, "the tabernacle of God is with men." Before the temple was built in the Old Testament, the center of worship was a portable building, the Tabernacle. The verb, "to tabernacle," is found only twice in the New Testament. The first time is John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (tabernacled with us), and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth. The other place is here in Revelation 21:3. The literal translation is that God "sets up His tent" with us, in a complete reversal of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, God dwells with His people up close and personal. This goes beyond our deaths. It goes beyond anyone's death. In Christ we live to see the end of death."

Application: Joseph Kennedy Sr. and the end to death.

There is a story about the Kennedy family that I find sad. I don't know for sure if it is true, but it was something I learned watching some documentary some time ago. Joseph Kennedy Sr. patriarch of the family, was determined to make that Kennedy clan a dynasty, including having sons in positions of political power. That included president. I was inclined, as I watched this show, to believe that Joe Sr. had his eyes on John, but it was not the case. The golden boy of the family was the eldest son, Joseph Jr. He was tall, intelligent, athletic, savvy with movie star good looks and he was Joe Sr.'s pick to run for and gain the highest office in the land.

During the Second World War, Joe Jr. volunteered to fly a plane loaded to the ceiling with explosives. It was a dangerous assignment, but the Kennedys have always been risk-takers. We may never know why, but the plane exploded over the English Channel, and nothing was found of the plane, its contents, or Joe Jr. After hearing the news of his eldest son's death, Joe Sr. spent much of the rest of his life at the family estate, seated on the balcony overlooking the ocean, drinking wine, listening to classical music and saying over and over again, "the best days of my life are behind me." He was never the same.

A vision of this promise will not take away the grief of such a tragedy. Losing a beloved child is one of the worst traumas for the human soul. But if you have a vision of this promise in Revelation, then even in the depths of despair you will still know that the best days still remain ahead. The follower of Christ outlives even death itself.

Conclusion

The Bible speaks of people who through their fear of death spend their entire lives as slaves. While death still looms over all life here on earth, and the grief of parting from loved ones is fierce and very, very painful, there is a promise that, once embedded in the back of our minds, colors how we view life and even how we view death. Death has an end. In Christ life stretches out before us forever. We still grieve, but we do so with a hope that the person outside of Christ cannot even imagine. There is an end to even death itself.