

Adventuring with God

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When Theology Matters

Tony's mother has passed into eternity. The death of a parent reminds us that this is not where the story ends. We come to know each other, we love and quarrel and give and take through all the stages of life, and then one of us is gone. And we are left with the choice: Do I believe what the scriptures say about the death of one of God's children? Or do I sorrow, as those who have no hope?

When someone is ninety-two years old, as Gin was, it is easier to say goodbye. Not easy, but easier. We can rejoice at their relatively long and rich life by human standards. In her case, her life touched many others, and they were enriched by the experience. Her unique personality endeared her and made Christians seem a little less polished and predictable than the glossy facsimiles that we see portrayed on promotions for large suburban churches. We could overlook her testy and tough exterior because we knew she had a heart that genuinely cared about other people. As one of our children remarked, "I never heard her complain about anything." Gin had learned through the difficulties of her life how to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

And now we are left with our theology to comfort us in her absence. Theology sounds so cold and impersonal. .until we come up against one of the challenging realities of life. Then the promises of God take on depth and warmth and penetrate into the innermost chambers of our aching heart. Then the truth of Christ's victory on the Cross becomes triumphant, defying Satan to rejoice over what is causing us pain. We can see beyond this final enemy – death – and understand in a new way how important Jesus is and what a difference His work made to us and the millions of others who have put their faith in Him.

Paul seems to taunt the powers of the enemy when he asks in 1 Corinthians 15: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" He carefully explains that if we only have hope in this life, then we are of all men *most miserable*. We enjoy many good things by belonging to Christ, and these things we can enjoy even now. Peace, joy, righteousness, and comfort

are ours the moment we receive Jesus. And throughout our lives we can access the power of the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of fellow believers, and enjoy an abiding relationship with God himself. However. .all these things will one day cease. Like Gin, our bodies will give out and stop functioning as they should. As good as these benefits are right now, they will one day come to an end.

The real glory of a Christian life is in what happens once everything that can be shaken is shaken. Praise God, His word and promises are eternal. They cannot be shaken. They become our rock of confidence when the cares of life overwhelm us. When we look into the face of someone dear whose spirit is gone we realize how weak the flesh is. We realize that their earthly life can be here one moment and gone the next. But "thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore. .stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

Gin's labor in the Lord was not in vain. And our love for her can go on and on, not affected at all by her earthly body being buried in the ground. We will see her again – God's promise is sure! "And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18).

It all sounds so academic until we look at death head on. Then the comfort of the Scripture washes over us like warm water, bathing away the fear and the doubts we may feel in spite of what we have been taught. This is when we

appreciate fully the steadfast love and faithfulness of our God. God, who cannot lie, has promised. And as the writer of Hebrews points out, His character makes His word immeasurably valuable to us. [So that] "We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:18-19).

This kind of hope cannot be duplicated in the world. It offers no one hope that there is something to be gained beyond the pleasures and experiences we know right now. That's why

Tony and I can rejoice today in spite of our sorrow. We know that Gin is getting to experience the truth of Romans 8:37-38. It just doesn't get any better than this!

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

*"There's a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar,
For the Father waits over the way to prepare us a dwelling place there.*

*We shall sing on that beautiful shore the melodious songs of the blest;
And our spirits shall sorrow no more – not a sigh for the blessing of rest.*

*To our bountiful Father above we will offer our tribute of praise,
For the glorious gift of His love and the blessings that hallow our days.*

*In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore."*

Text by Sanford F. Bennett