

# A Feast Unlike Any Other

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You can't imagine life without him.

Seeing your dad scoop up your younger sister in his arms and smother her with kisses while she giggles with delight and pretends that she wants to get out of his clutches brings a smile to everyone's face. Maybe it's playing catch in the backyard or burrowing into his arms at night as he reads you a book before bed. Maybe it's his gentle admonishments (or sometimes not so gentle, when you know you've gone too far) to pick up your room or the bathroom, or "help your mother clean the table!" Dad was there yesterday, he is here today, and certainly, he will be there tomorrow. Until there are no more treatments to try, and death is only a few months away.

Maybe it's your mom who is sick. And not just, "Mom has the flu and will be better soon," but "Mom is sick, and the doctors say if this chemo treatment doesn't work, she won't be around to celebrate my birthday in six months."

It's not possible for Mom to be gone! The house would stop running! Not only does Mom do, well, everything, but she is the very picture and example of love. Where else do you run, but to your mother?

Did you have a sister or brother that died? For you and your family, there were no words strong enough to describe the pain. All joy had been sucked out of life, and you didn't care if tomorrow came or not. In fact, you almost resented the fact that the sun rose the next morning. How dare time continue as if nothing had happened? The beauty of a spring morning stood in stark contrast to your dark and stormy emotions.

It's the finality of death that is so scary. It means the end of so many things: no more fishing, bike rides, or birthday cakes. No more working in the yard on Saturday or playing catch behind the house. Mom or Dad will not be there for your wedding, or to see your first baby get baptized.

We think to ourselves: it shouldn't be this way. This is too hard, too painful.

But it is this way—death is a reality for some now, but for all of us someday.

You may still ask, however, why? Is all of this pain and suffering really necessary? Can't there be an easier way? With our act of sin in our first father Adam, death was introduced, and the way of the Christian life is now a way of suffering and trial. We try to mask this reality by surrounding ourselves with comfortable things, or as Leroy and Sandy said, "We hide from the reality of death." In one of the books the DeVrieses recommended, the author, Mark Ashton, quotes Sir Thomas Browne to illustrate this point that "The long habit of living indisposeth us for dying."<sup>1</sup> Death strips away this façade. Our attention is driven away from this life and to another.

The Christian life is a life of constant and ongoing transformation. We are led from physical and spiritual immaturity to physical and spiritual maturity. No longer do we have our affections fixated on the earthly, but as new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), we put our affections more and more on things above. We are transformed from children who desire spiritual milk to men and women who devour strong meat (Heb. 5:13–14). This transformation takes place slowly, oftentimes painfully, in the life of the believing child of God. J.C. Ryle vividly described it in his book *Holiness*, that "The work of sanctification within the child of God is like the wall of Jerusalem—the building goes forward, 'even in troublous times' (Dan. 9:25)." John Calvin wrote, "And indeed, this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through

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<sup>1</sup> *On My Way to Heaven*, Ashton, Mark, 10Publishing, 2010, p 6

continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruption of the flesh.”<sup>2</sup> Facing death in our loved ones, or perhaps in ourselves, is an instrument God uses in our personal transformation, to remind us that it is “through much tribulation [that we] enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). As Leroy put it in our meeting, “Priorities change; *things* don’t matter anymore.”

For some, death is a terror. For others, it should be. I think of the man or woman who has decided that they have had enough of marriage and parenting and who, leaving a trail of destruction behind them, walk out of their home and into the arms of another. Such a man or woman should follow the hopeless and terrifying advice of the poet Dylan Thomas and “Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

For the child of God, there is no raging against the dying of the light. This is not because of the child of God himself or herself. As Leroy stated, “We are owed death.” “Death (has) passed upon all men” through the sin of our first father, Adam (Rom. 5:12). The verdict upon all of mankind is guilty—guilty of violating the clear command of God not to eat of the Tree, guilty of not loving God with all of our hearts and guilty of not loving our neighbor as ourselves, and guilty of taking every single one of the Ten Commandments and trampling it underfoot.

Death should be a terror for all of us. Thanks be to God that it isn’t.

The power of death, for the believing child of God, has been conquered, so that it is no longer the fearsome foe that it once was, and continues to be for those outside of Christ. For the child of God, death is now pressed into the service of King Jesus and is an instrument that is used to transport the believer from earth to glory. This enables the outlook of the believer, when facing death, to be markedly different from that of the unbeliever. This was driven home to me as I sat in the living room of the couple for whom death is not abstract. There was no anger, no raging, no bitter, rash questioning of God’s way for them. The sadness revealed there was not even a stoic resignation, rather a contented waiting upon the will of their Father in heaven.

This does not mean that there is no pain in the death of a loved one. Far from it. Weeping is an appropriate response to the dissolution of the earthly ties (see John 11:35). But amid our sorrow, there is hope.

This is not because physically the righteous die differently. We face the same diagnosis as the world, the same chemotherapy, and the same surgeries. The same pains and physical indignities are visited upon righteous and unrighteous alike.

The difference is spiritual. The power of death has been conquered by one who took upon himself our human nature and who submitted himself to death and the grave, not to be conquered by it, but to overthrow its power. “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, young child of God, that final breath taken by your mother, father, sibling, or friend, whether taken at the end of a long, painful sickness or suddenly in an accident, is only the last breath they take in this vale of tears.

Perhaps the hardest part will be the empty spot at the kitchen table where your mom or dad used to sit. It was *their* spot. And it’s empty now. The void reminds you of their absence every time you sit down to eat.

But let the word of God remind you of another supper: the feast that your loved one will soon join, or has already joined. The Bible calls it the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7–9). At this supper, we read of a woman being seated. The reference is to the church, but it’s okay if you think of it as referring to your mom; she is a part of that church. She is dressed in the most

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin’s *Institutes*, 3.3.9, as cited in *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation*, Marcus Peter Johnson, Crossway, p 132.

beautiful clothes you can imagine. This dinner is a wedding feast, so your mom must be dressed that way. Every guest wears those same stunningly radiant clothes. A few tried to come in wearing something else, but they were thrown out (Matt. 22:11–13).

The feast is in honor of someone very special—the Lamb, who is Jesus Christ. The clothes your mom or dad are wearing is the righteousness of Christ. But the Lamb is so gracious that he adorns your parent with those clothes and then calls them *their* righteousnesses.

Glory awaits your mom! Glory awaits your dad! Your sister or brother who died is seated at that table, adorned with those lovely clothes!

God is visiting you—to bring your loved one to himself in glory and to remind you again that this life is not your home. We are pilgrims and strangers, and our longing for our heavenly home is increased when a loved one is stricken in this way. Who wants this life to be all that there is when it is filled with such pain?

“And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

A feast awaits! Blessed are those called to that supper!

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