

MORNING DEVOTIONS

PIE IN THE SKY WHEN YOU DIE

In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, one of Tolkien's characters, after seeing a friend he previously had thought dead, asks, "*Is everything sad to come untrue?*" The Christian answer is that, yes, everything sad is going to come untrue and will somehow be better, because we believe in God and His eternal purposes – that life does not end in death. There is hope for those who were broken and lost.

But on the other hand, some people scoff at the idea of a belief in God and eternal reward in Heaven. So, they sneer at the Christian faith and say it's all rubbish – pie in the sky when you die. A criticism of Christianity – a vague, silly and fanciful hope that there is more after death. Isn't it a bit irrational? But there is a problem. We assume that everyone agrees with us – that all the big questions have been answered.

But the reality is that many say, "Don't know- and I don't care about your religious view". It has not relevance for them. It's all pie in the sky. Make believe. A story for little children. And if you mention God, some say, "How do you know? Why should I accept this? It's alright for you!" They are not vaguely interested.

Talk to any Christian evangelist who stops people in a street with the question, "Do you believe you will meet God in Heaven when you die?" Many will just stare blankly at you, or walk away – not interested. There seems to be a lack of sensitivity in this current era to spiritual questions. So they just shrug the shoulder and change the subject.

We do our best to avoid the topic of death – we deny it and try everything to push it away. There are more pleasant things to think about. Christianity is viewed as simply an emotional or psychological crutch. Weak people need such beliefs to help them cope, to help them get by in life.

Marx for example said that religion was the opiate of the masses. It is like a drug, and keeps them contented with their oppression in this life, knowing a better life awaits them. It is all just 'pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye'. Guess what? There are heaps of references in the Bible that tell me there is more to come after we die. This life is not the end of everything. There is everlasting life to enjoy with the God who loves us.

But I want to say that everything in the Bible points to Eternity, and everything within us cries out for it. As Solomon observed in the Old Testament, God "has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God designed us to live in Eternity.

His work with us is not finished in this life. God has prepared something incomprehensibly beautiful for those who love Him and trust Him – something that lies beyond time, something so beautiful and vast and breathtaking that only Eternity is big enough to contain it. The Apostle Paul tells us about the wonders of Eternity in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – and his description of Eternity gives us grounds for confidence and courage as we face the trials and pressures of the present time:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

This is the Christian hope. It is more than merely looking on to life beyond the grave. It declares that everything which happens to us in this life is directly related to what is coming – in fact, is getting us ready for it. Nothing, then, is purposeless or futile in our present experience. You don't have to be frightened of death. If you trust God, He will welcome you to His eternal home in Heaven.

The hope of Heaven and the certainty of arriving at our final destination, the realisation that 'this world is not my home, I'm just a passing through', is something which gives us the courage, strength and ability to face all the ups and downs of this present life. It's not just pie in the sky when you die, but as someone has said tongue in cheek, “steak on your plate while you wait”!

Next time you hear someone say, “You stupid Christians – what you believe is pie in the sky when you die”, just remind them of C. S. Lewis, the brilliant author. He said that the people who have made the biggest difference in this world have been those who believed most strongly in the next world – or something like that. And I don't doubt he was right.

But even if we could verify that assertion as a fact, it still wouldn't satisfy some. Lewis has famously also said, “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” God has put Eternity in the heart of each of us, and whilst we may busy ourselves in all sorts of pursuits, it is only God, through the person of Jesus Christ, who gives us true peace and meaning.