

Dust To Dust

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In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Genesis 3:19).

Earlier this year, on January 13, I received the message that my only sibling, my brother Joel, had been hospitalized with severe congestive heart failure complicated by pneumonia. His lungs were filled with fluid and his kidneys had shut down. I immediately went to see him, having been granted permission by the hospital, but he could no longer speak. I did not recognize him at first as he had grown so gaunt. At the end of my visit, I hugged his failing body and told him that I loved him. He died the next day.

Joel had chosen to be cremated, and, as I left the mortuary carrying both urns containing the ashes of his mortal remains, I couldn't help but think of the lyrics, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother. . ."

I also thought of **Genesis 3:19** reminding us that, by God's Grace, we are formed from the dust of the ground and back to dust we shall go. All of us.

It is, for me, a sobering and NECESSARY thought that I, too, will in a few-years' time be remains inside a little container. It is a NECESSARY thought because it reminds me of the proper attitude of humility.

Whatever accomplishments I might have achieved, whatever possessions I might have owned, whatever status I might have attained, even my reputation — those things won't fit inside my urn.

Nor do those things define me in the eyes of God. He is not impressed by the awards hanging on the wood-paneled walls of my paid-off house in this upscale California suburb. Even my new iPhone 12 Max Pro with 128 GB of memory does not raise His eyebrows.

So, does this mean that my life, beginning with nothing and ending with nothing is a complete wash? If nothing I accomplish from now on will outlive me, shall I just watch reruns of, "This Is Your Life" on TV?

And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

I need to think about the things that I use to define myself, those things that I believe to give my life purpose and value, those things that I do in order to receive praise from others, to achieve the status of a "pillar of the community," which gives me a place of honor in the city gates.

I need to then contrast THOSE things with the things that God DOES care about. And are those things a mystery? Has God some "secret knowledge" about His Will for me that He challenges me to discover? If I open my Bible, is there a large "X" where His Will might be found if I dig hard enough? Must I be a member of Mensa to understand His will for me?

Of course God doesn't try to "hide" his Will for us or make it "difficult" to discover. What does the Bible say? *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).*

What does God want with us? Relationship. He delights in us. We are part of His Creation; that part in which God was also pleased. We were good-to-go, turnkey humans entirely acceptable to God when we were created. He wants us back. Through the sacrifice of His son, He has provided a way for us and wants us to return to Him in humbleness and contrition.

The quote from Ecclesiastes above mentions envy of others as being the basis for worldly accomplishments. But completely transparent and openly revealed in His Word, we find over and over again that we are to love one another (see **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**). Envy should have no place in our relationships with one another.

So, going forward in the certain knowledge of death and the dissolution of this body into dust, how should I live my life? In a way that is pleasing to God, staying in relationship with Him, and trusting in

the One in whom I live and move and have my being. The One who has sacrificed so much out of His love for me that I CAN have the opportunity for eternal relationship with Him.

. . . Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).