

SESSION EIGHT // Resurrection as Beginning

New Testament professor, Dwight Peterson, shares about anger, grief, and the hope that there is something beyond the grave. Perhaps the only way to live well is to understand how to die well.

Watch the Film *This is Not the End with Dwight Peterson*

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/this-is-not-the-end>

Going Deeper

1. Peterson is asked “Are you mad at God?” He responds, “Sometimes I’m mad. I mean, how can you not be? Upset and all, I’m losing. Upset and all of what I had to live through. Upset of bad decisions I’ve made because of being in a wheelchair.”

When have you been angry at God?

2. Peterson says that he finds it to be a gift from God not to “hold onto anger”: “I was always sort of comforted by the idea that whatever was happening, however painful it was, that God was with me.” However, Peterson is not critical of anger toward God. “There are whole Psalms in the Psalter that consisted of people yelling at God,” he comments.

What are some examples of Psalms that share their anger toward God?²³

How can “giving our whole selves to God” also include anger?

3. Peterson reflects, “I think I hurt for other people’s pain more than I hurt for my own.” Peterson recalls a friend’s wife going through chemotherapy, and an aunt who is affected by Alzheimer’s. Peterson says “Christianity does not ignore the pain in the world,” but there is also the “eschatological promise” that “someday all tears will be wiped dry.”²⁴

²³ See TWOTP series, “The Psalmist’s Cry,” interviews with Walter Brueggemann and curriculum:

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/bundle/the-psalmists-cry>

²⁴ By “eschatological promise,” Peterson is referring to the promise made at the end of time (*eschaton* is Greek for “the end”).

How does this hope that is given in the future something that might provide us comfort in the present?

4. Peterson is asked, “What hope are you finding through the pain?” Peterson responds, “I’ve been formed to believe in the gospel, and part of the gospel is that this world is not the end.” He alludes to planning his own funeral and picking out the hymns of praise and many people “holding up in [his] own, sometimes, unbelief that this world is not the end.”

How can we gain confidence that “this world is not the end”?

5. Peterson tells a story of an uncle died in 1990s whose name was also “Dwight.” He describes the image of family and friends having “their hands on the [casket]” telling stories and joking about uncle Dwight. Peterson says it was a “lovely vignette of an beloved uncle who had died. It was sad that he had died; we were all sad he had died, and yet we all knew that was not the end of his story. That was not the end of our story.”

How would you write your own eulogy? How might you allow people to grieve for you, but also say that your death is not the end to your story?

Reflection

The promise of the resurrection is a promise to be fulfilled sometime in the future, but how we look forward to the future makes a difference to how we live in the now. The hope that one day, like Jesus, we will also be raised, that death will not be the final enemy and that the effects of sin does not have the final say, gives us the abundant life that starts today. However, this is not the hope of an empty promise, an appointment unkept. I’ve noticed the trust that someone would do what they said that they would do diminishes with each generation. At one time, a person was only as good as her word, but today promises are easily broken. One comedian said that because of social media, most people say “maybe” instead of “yes” or “no” because they are always hoping for something better to come along. So we’ve become a “flakey” and uncommitted generation. However, it would be a shame if we were hold out for something better than the resurrected life.

The experience of broken promises is widespread. We’ve seen parents break their marriage covenants. We’ve seen priests and politicians violate their vows. We’ve seen authority go back on their word. If we are no better than our promises then we will continue to be a broken and uncertain people, people without hope. When words fail to have meaning then our lives will be empty of meaning. We become “nothings.” Because life becomes meaningless, many people act in ways that are meaningless. Many young

people get on the internet to “troll” and “cyber bully” others. Many young people look down at their mobile devices and stare into the cool light just to have something to do. A frequent phrase thrown around by young people is “what ever.” “Whateverism” is the attitude that things don’t really matter, but “whateverism” is life lived in the tomb. It is to look at the great wealth and potential of life and see emptiness. It is to look at an open field and see that nothing can flourish.

How can we come to see the value of this life? How can a nothing become a something? The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that in order to find meaning, one must gain some mastery over one’s life and rise above the herd. Nietzsche’s image of the *Übermensch* or “overman” is one who is able to free themselves of cultural bondage and assert meaning through “will to power.” The reason Nietzsche found this to be the solution for the modern person was that he saw that the modern world had killed off God. This was his famous declaration: “God is dead.” If humans no longer had a purpose to live, then they must make a purpose for themselves or else they would make nothingness to be their purpose. Nietzsche’s observation was remarkably true, but was his solution a viable one? Can humanity survive through pure dominance of one’s will to power? We have seen even more atrocities that have occurred through exerting one’s will over the other.

Others have proposed the solution as “will to meaning” rather than will to power. This was the contribution of Viktor Frankl whose search for meaning during his time as a prisoner of a Nazi concentration camp led to his ideas regarding what he called “logotherapy.” To find meaning in even the direst of circumstances will lead us to see that the light of the resurrection is even present in the darkness.²⁵ What kind of meaning does your life hold? How can you find purpose and joy, even in the darkest places?

Much of our culture, especially in the West, is either a denial and rejection of death or a participation in practices that lead to death. The resurrected life neither rejects death nor sees that death is the answer. It sees the ultimate triumph over death. In this world, we do experience the struggle to grasp this kind of life and hope, but it is struggle is only temporary. The resurrection is the promise of life and we have glimpses of this promise everyday. In the air we breathe, in the plants that grow, in the babies born, in the rotation of the earth, the resurrection pulses in all life, because it is the life of God. Even before the promise of resurrection is fully realized, we can still live confidently that life will sustain us through the most difficult times. The will to life and to love overcomes the will to death and to decay.

May you see your life as risen as Christ was risen.

²⁵ See the TWOTP series, “Sitting in the Dark: Growing Through the Poetry of Pain,” especially the curriculum on Glennon Doyle Melton where I talk specifically about the work of psychiatrist Viktor Frankl.