



Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

It is tragic to go through life all alone, and even a greater tragedy to cross Jordan River alone into that dark eternity which all experience in that loneliness. The reception rooms of nursing homes present a sad sight to the casual visitor. The room is often full of wheel chairs and crutches occupied by the elderly, some of whom have received no visitors in months, yet wait expectantly just in case a loved one of the past may take the time to stop by. Many wait in vain until the sands of time dwindle and they depart this life alone and unsung. Many old 'friends' and relatives will come to their funerals, but too late to offer any joy to the deceased.

When I delivered newspapers as a boy, there was a friend of my mother who loved to talk. She talked without commercial interruption. When I stopped by her home to collect her monthly paper bill. She would keep me longer than I could afford, but I stayed and listened anyway. Her conversation was usually mundane and without any significance except one thing that she always did. She always complimented me for whatever she could think about that was worthy of comment. She never failed to preface her compliments with this phrase; *"I believe in giving others their roses while they live."* She would then proceed with some compliment whether deserved or not. I will never forget that kind lady nor her oft repeated philosophy on roses. Her name was Mrs. Johnson.

My mother used to sing an old gospel song that contained the sentiments expressed by Mrs. Johnson. It was published by the Carter Family in 1934 – a group very popular in the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains where we lived. Here is an excerpt:

*Wonderful things of folks are said
When they have passed away
Roses adorn their narrow bed
Over the sleeping clay.
Give me the roses while I live
Trying to cheer me on
Useless are flowers that you give
After the soul has gone.*

There is another beautiful hymn my mom used to sing entitled, *I come to the Garden Alone*. It relates the account of Mary Magdalene who came to the Garden Tomb while it was yet dark and while the dew was still on the roses. Mary came, as we all must come, alone to Christ. In our calling and election in Christ, there are no sponsors for our souls other than the Holy Ghost that draws us to the throne of Mercy and Grace.

There is a valley that many of us have walked, and all of us shall surely walk at God's discretion, in future. That Valley is the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In fact, we all LIVE in that Valley since our very lives are held in the hand of God moment by moment. Many pass through this Valley, so characteristic of mortal life itself, in great fear and trembling. Some attempt to cover that fear with entertainment, drugs, alcohol, sex, or even gambling. But these never suffice. In the back of every mind is the certain knowledge that the end is coming to this earthly life. To the believer, that specter is only a shadow and of no material substance.

A favorite short story writer and playwright by the name of William Saroyan, was noted to be agnostic. He became seriously ill in 1982 and was admitted to hospital. His condition would prove terminal. Before dying, he wrote a note to Walter Kronkite of CBS News with the stipulation that it not be published until after his demise. After Saroyan's passing, Kronkite read the note on his evening news program: "*I always knew that everybody had to die sooner or later, but I felt that in my case, there might be an exception – now what?*" Great question! Perhaps the Rich Man who fared sumptuously while the beggar, Lazarus, languished without his gate should have asked the same question. Unfortunately, he discovered the "NOW WHAT" too late to make amends.

No one can share the soul of another. Each soul is inviolate to human bonds. We may love others; we may have strong and loyal friendships; but we cannot enter into the soul of another and share in their inner hurts and joys. When God made Adam a 'living soul' it was only to Adam to whom that soul was on loan. It could not be shared, and neither can our souls be shared with another human being. As far as our souls are concerned, most of us go through this life alone in the company of others who are alone. There is no one with whom we can share our very souls – but One, the Lord Jesus Christ!

In the account of the woman taken in adultery, at last the woman came face to face with the Lord – ALONE. That is the way we must ALL come to the Lord, and that is the way we face Him on the last day.

The Bride of Christ (the Church) is a more Holy and indivisible union than the bonds of holy matrimony to another in this world. *For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.* (Isaiah 54:5)

This is true because only Christ can enter into our hearts and souls to abide with us – not for a season – but forever! His blood relationship to us is stronger than that of any brother, sister, mother, or father. *A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.* (Prov 18:24) There is a door that must open for us, and so the Lord comes into our hearts and souls. In fact, Christ stands at that door which, in case of the quoted text, is the very door of the church: *behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.* (Rev 3:8) and *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* (Rev 3:20)

It is Christ who provides the door, and it is Christ that IS the Door. We have not come to the Door, or opened the Door, by our own wills. It is Christ who is the Author

of our calling and Salvation. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* (John 10:7-9) We do not come without being drawn to Christ. *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:* (John 6:44) That may defy our understanding of free will, but that is the doctrine of Christ. Dispute it at your own peril.

As committed Christians, we need never fear walking alone either in this life, or in the final sleep of death. He is with us *always, even unto the end of the world.* We may sing with the old hymn writer, *"We won't have to cross Jordan alone."* When the curtain of life falls on this life, there is no one who can stand with us to pass through that veil of unknowing other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He comes into our hearts to abide ALWAYS. *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* (Heb 13:5)

I visit often in hospitals and nursing homes. I have observed a difference in the way many observe their coming departure from this life. Those who do not know Christ as their Savior, Redeemer, and Lord, view that prospect with dread and worry. They are in the depths of loneliness because they do not have the Lord at their side. But those who know Christ, *and are the called according to His purpose,* do not suffer a like sorrow and loneliness. If they have no visitors, they are still sweet with a peace that surpasses all understanding. They have come to know intimately the stranger that attended the two on the Road to Damascus. They have known Him in the breaking of bread, and they know that He will attend them across the swirling waters ahead.

The Christian saint has a comfort that the lost can never enjoy. That is the certain knowledge that he shall be remembered! The names of the lost are of no import whatsoever for they are not written down where the fires of Hell cannot scorch and burn – the Book of Life. But the names of the saints are entered into the Book of Life – God's Book of Remembrance. Is this not a comfort for the soul teetering at the brink of eternity?

Do you feel that the Lord is with you under every condition of life. If you know Him as your Lord, perhaps you are as the two men on that Damascus Road who walk and talk with Him, but do not know Him as well as you need to know Him. If this describes your condition, perhaps you should see to a better knowledge of the One who bled and died for your sins to redeem you.