

## Good Sorrow

Not long ago, a longtime, and dear, friend of ours lost her husband to what seemed to be a galloping cancer. He was a good man, the kind of upright fellow we were happy to see her marrying back perhaps 25 years, a godly, hardworking Christian, and active churchman. She herself evokes the Proverbs 31 description.

When something like this assails so rapidly, many stressful events are compressed into a short time. Good friends were requested to pray, and did, but what seemed a serious medical situation progressed to the imminent end of life far too fast, and that with the hospital restrictions attendant the Covid crisis. On the heels of prayer and effort came sorrow. Now the sorrow of a Christian over the death of a Christian is not the despairing sorrow over one who is lost eternally, but it is real and profound. We feel it. Though separated by years and thousands of miles, we both shed tears over one we knew more by report and reputation than personally, and over what we knew our friend was feeling. We knew he had a hard go of it (which she also felt keenly) leading up to his death, and we felt for her during that stressful period beforehand, and the more as she lost her spouse. It is sorrow for her and will be for some time, and sorrow for us and so many others who knew them.

By this time in our lives, we have each lost both parents. Each of those losses was its own special sorrow and left its own set of scars. And each of us have lost friends, sometimes age-mates or even younger, some knowing the Lord, and some for whom we find that doubtful at best. We had for a number of years two dogs and two cats, each of whom was dear, and each of whom we had to put down (I'd thought I'd never do that, but it came to be necessary in each case). Sorrow for each.

Yet sorrow of this kind is good. Curiously, the more painful it is, perhaps the better a thing it is. How is that?

In general, the greater sorrow comes with the loss that takes away a piece of you. It has to do with the assignment of value to the person (for this purpose, your dogs and cats and horses count as people) you have lost. And this is not pragmatic or commercial value, but a value of the kind God assigns to each of us, wherein He sent His Son to die on our behalf to rescue us from what we so richly deserve. In some sense, we don't completely understand the kind of value we assign to those we love, but we feel it deeply in these moments of sorrow. This is a good thing. It elevates what counts and eclipses lesser things. It hurts, but we would not choose to escape the hurt; it is better to hurt than to reckon the person not worthy of hurting over.

Of course, I refer here to the sorrow associated with death. There are other good and worthy sorrows, especially those associated with things we ought not have done and thus will do no more. But death is something to sorrow over. Jesus Himself wept before the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew His very next act would be to call him from the grave. I do not know in all particulars just why Jesus wept at that time, but I do not think it was about Lazarus so much as the very fact of death, and the curse upon the whole creation. While God's determined will allowed for sin and all its consequences, death being one of the most profound, His creation did not inherently require death. That happened on account of man's will. And it's something that merits deep sorrow.

Blessedly, good sorrow diminishes with time, and is often replaced by the fondest of memories. For the Christian contemplating the death of a Christian, there is the knowledge that while we have lost someone we love, yet that someone is now in the presence of Christ, worldly ills, aches, and yes, sorrows, all healed. He or she is enjoying a better existence than we can imagine, free from the sins and offenses of others, but the more blessedly, completely free from his or her own. The loss, and the sorrow, is ours who remain in this broken world - for now.