What Is It Like to Die?

Peter Marshall, a Scottish-American preacher (1902-1949), spoke to a regiment of midshipmen in the Naval Academy at Annapolis on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941 – the very day Pearl Harbor was bombed. In his message, he shared this account:

In a home of which I know, a little boy – the only son – was ill with an incurable disease. Month after month the mother had tenderly nursed him, read to him, and played with him, hoping to keep him from realizing the dreadful finality of the doctor's diagnosis. But as the weeks went on and he grew no better, the little fellow gradually began to understand that he would never be like the other boys he saw playing outside his window. Small as he was, he began to understand the meaning of the term death, and he knew that he was going to die.

One day his mother had been reading to him the stirring tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table: of Lancelot and Guinevere and Elaine, the maid of Astolat, and of that last glorious battle in which so many brave knights met their death.

As she closed the book, the boy sat silent for an instant, and then asked the question that had been weighing on his heart: "Mother, what is it like to die?" Quick tears sprang to her eyes, and she fled to the kitchen supposedly to tend to something on the stove. She knew it was a question with deep significance. She knew it must be answered satisfactorily. So, she leaned for an instant against the kitchen cabinet, her knuckles pressed against the smooth surface, and breathed a hurried prayer…

*"Kenneth," she said as she returned to [his] room, "you remember when you were a tiny boy how you used to play so hard all day that when night came you would be too tired even to undress, and you would tumble into mother's bed and fall asleep? That was not your bed. It was not where you belonged. And you stayed there only a little while. In the morning, much to your surprise, you would wake up and find yourself in your own bed in your own room. You were there because someone had loved you and taken care of you. Your father had come – with big strong arms – and carried you away. Kenneth, death is just like that. We just wake up some morning to find ourselves in the other room – our own room where we belong in heaven – because the Lord Jesus loved us and carried us there."**

Jesus said to His troubled disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Jesus is the Way to heaven (John 14:6), for He died on the cross for our sins so that we may have forgiveness and receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 6:23).

God will save and give an eternal, heavenly home to those who place their faith and trust in Jesus (Acts 16:30-31), turn from sin in repentance (Acts 17:30-31), confess Jesus before men (Romans 10:9-10), and are baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). He will continue to cleanse from sin and prepare for a heavenly home those who continue to walk in the light of His Word (1 John 1:7-9).

For the faithful child of God, death is the passageway to awaken in a place that is far better than anything in this world (Philippians 1:23).

-- David A. Sargent

* From *A Man Called Peter*, by Catherine Marshall, pp. 230-231, 272-273.