

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of
Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

"...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

July 2, 2009

And the World Wept

Jeff Straub

I was about to board a plane for Budapest, Hungary, to teach for a week in Arad, Romania, when my eyes were drawn to the TV monitors across the JFK airport. Every monitor that was not giving passenger information was carrying the story—Michael Jackson was dead. From my accommodations here in Romania, the TV news (Romanian) carries the story as a lead feature, showing video clips from London, Paris, India, the Philippines, Japan, and finally, the National Stadium in Bucharest, Romania, where Jackson once performed. The flowers and candles are piling up, and the tears are flowing. There have even been reports of fans committing suicide. The world weeps at the loss of the "King of Pop."

Jackson's death will likely be a major story around the world for at least the next few weeks, and maybe longer. Perhaps some think that the death of one so detached from Christianity is of little consequence. After all, people die. I wondered how many others died in the world the day Michael Jackson died—Farrah Fawcett, at least, and hundreds more, no doubt. And why should the Christian even care?

It behooves believers to pause and reflect on this cultural phenomenon, especially in these days. I don't know where Jackson is today. To my knowledge, he never professed faith in Christ, without which no man can stand justified before a living God. But his death does remind us of several things that we would all do well to ponder. I pen these few words for believers to stop and consider amidst the world's fixation with the death of such an iconic figure.

- 1.) For most unbelieving humanity, death is the inevitable and certain conclusion to life. The majority of the human race—now numbered at more than 6.25 billion—has little hope of bypassing this ultimate end, and many face their approaching demise with a great sense of foreboding. As of this writing, coroners have not determined the cause of Jackson’s death, so whether he had sense of death’s imminence, none can say. But when one so well known dies so young (he was 50), many of those still left living are filled with a greater sense of fear and uncertainty because they realize just how tenuous life really is. Death appears certain and all, it seems, will face it. For the world, this is a frightening reality. At this juncture, believers ought to hear the Word of God echo in their ears: “it is appointed for man to die once” (Hebrews 9:27) which, in turn, should remind us of Gen. 3:19, that we come from dust and to dust we will return. Death is the great certainty in this life, especially for those who live without divine grace. It is approaching, it cannot be avoided, and it is a thing to be feared.
- 2.) Death is the great equalizer: rich and poor, famous and obscure, male or female. Death, when it hits, brings the same physical end to all of humanity. The brain quits, the heart stops, and life, as humans define it, is over. Not even one’s personal fortune or social status can bring relief of this destiny. Again the Word of God ought to echo in our ears: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Since all of us have sinned (Rom. 3:23), all of us can expect to receive the due recompense—the cessation of life itself. No one lives forever . . . at least not in life as we know it now. The world intuitively knows this despite all protestations to the contrary.
- 3.) Physical death is not the end of all things; it is only the beginning. For the believer, death is the beginning of life eternal, when we are ushered into the presence of God to enjoy Him forever. For the unbeliever, death is the beginning of unparalleled judgment and unending chastisement. Though a great debate rages today on the existence of future punishment, the Bible portrays the prospect for the lost as never-ending torment, “where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). If the Bible is true, then the greatest tragedy is not physical death itself, but a failure to get ready for the inevitable and to die unprepared. How many of those in our acquaintance stand at the threshold of death, even now, unprepared? Life is short, and judgment is certain.
- 4.) Finally, God is the measure of all things. Regardless of who dies or what the circumstances of one’s death are, the final assessment of one’s life rests not in the accolades we receive from those who survive us. It comes from the perfect and final judgment of One who knows the end from the beginning. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us that judgment is coming, and Rev. 20:12 describes that judgment at which the unconverted, small and great, will stand. It will be a fearful day, for none may avoid it. Hades yields up its occupants, and even the sea cannot contain all whose remains were lost in its vastness.

We must remember and proclaim that death is certain, it equalizes, it brings judgment, and that God is the final arbiter of life. The world will weep in the days ahead because they have lost an icon. Believers should not merely sit by and gawk, or worse, turn away in apathy. We too should weep. We weep not because we lost someone dear to us. We weep for those Jackson left behind—for the world itself. Most of humanity is fixated on the wrong things. The great tragedy in all of this is not that Jackson is dead, though that is a sad fact, especially if he failed to

prepare to meet the Lord. The great tragedy is that so many fail to see the hand of God in all of this; so many have failed to submit their lives to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Who, then, should be weeping? ✠

This essay is by [Jeff Straub](#), faculty member of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses. New subscriptions to this electronic newsletter can be requested at inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu.

In Slumber Late

Anonymous

In a slumbir late as I was,
I harde a voice lowde call and true,
'Amende the, man, of thi trespace,
And aske forgeveness or evyr thou dye.'

In a slumbir late as I was,
I harde a voice lowde call and crye,
'Amende the, man, of thi trespace,
And aske forgeveness or evyr thou dye.'

'Beholde,' he saide, 'my creature,
Whome I did make so lyke unto me,
What payns I sofferd, I the ensure,
Where thou were thrall, to make the free.
Upon the cross with naylis thre
Fast I was naylyd for thyne offence;
Therefore remembir the or thou go hence.' ✠

The – thee; thi – thy; thrall - slave

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