

A Step in the Journey

A couple of weeks ago, I attended one of the best funerals I've ever been to. No doubt, there was sadness because we will miss our friend and brother. But there was great joy. We did not sorrow like those who have no hope. Rather, we rejoiced knowing that our brother is now with the Lord and will precede us when the Lord returns with the sound of the trumpet of God.

Throughout the funeral, I couldn't help but think of the day I visited my brother, Jimmy Hickman, in the hospital just over two months ago. He had just been diagnosed with stage four terminal cancer. The doctors were saying it was inoperable and, because of infection, untreatable. I somberly entered the room. I did not feel the joking mood that being around Jimmy usually prompted. After he and his wife, Gayle, informed me of the medical and physical information from the doctors, Gayle's phone rang. She stepped aside to take the call. I quietly asked Jimmy, "How are you doing spiritually right now?" I'll never forget his answer.

"I'm doing fine," he said. "This obviously wasn't the news we wanted to hear; but as far as I'm concerned, this is just one more step to get me where I've always wanted to go."

Why did Jimmy have this confidence? Was it because he had been perfect? No. Was it because he was the most awesome Christian ever? No. (Though he was a great man.) Jimmy had this confidence because he knew Jesus. He knew that in Jesus there is no condemnation (**Romans 8:1**). Jimmy had this confidence because he knew that God works everything out for good for those who love Him (**Romans 8:28**). Jimmy loved the Lord.

In **I John 5:13**, John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (ESV). We can know that we have eternal life when we believe in Jesus and in the power of His name. Jimmy believed in that and he knew where he was going.

Like Paul in **Philippians 3:12**, Jimmy knew that he wasn't perfect. But he knew he was pressing on for the goal in Christ Jesus. And, therefore, like Paul in **Philippians 1:21-23**, Jimmy knew that to die was gain because it meant departing and being with Christ.

Jesus didn't die so we could spend our final years, months, weeks, days, minutes in mortal fear for our souls. He did not die so we could constantly doubt wondering if we got enough right, if we were good enough, if we had done enough. Jesus died because we can't possibly get enough right, be good enough, do enough. He died to give us hope and confidence.

Jesus died so that when we die we can know that it is gain. He died so that when we die we can know that we are going to be with the Lord. He died so that when we die we can confidently say, "This is just one more step to get me where I've always wanted to go."