

Beyond the News

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When Children Die

By Peter Eng



Newton, Connecticut

Twenty children died when they were gunned down with five adults. The loss of the adults who died in the line of duty towards the children is severe and cannot be forgotten when we face the horror of the twenty children who died. We do well to remember the loss of the adults. At this point, I want to join in grieving for the loss of the twenty children and use this occasion to present hope in times of such tragedy.

As I write this, there are still many

unanswered questions. But the most difficult question is reserved for those who suffered the greatest loss. How will they cope with this wave of grief that crashes down on them, choking and drowning them? Where can they find strength to go on when the pain rips the heart out of them?

Sandy Hook, Connecticut is an upscale neighborhood you move into so you can get away from violence. Sandy Hook Elementary is where you happily pack your children off to another day of fun learning with excellent teachers with an administration to match. You look forward to your children finishing elementary school and moving on to middle school, then to high school. It was not so long ago when we were doing this with our own children.

When we see the horror of Sandy Hook Elementary, and the assault on the Amish Schoolhouse in Lancaster PA, we are deeply grateful to God for the opportunity of raising our children in peace. In addition, they have been easy children to raise, and that adds to our sense of gratitude to God. Regardless

of how easy or difficult our children are to raise, raising them is infinitely better than burying them.

Imagine yourself as a mother or a father looking down at the lifeless body of your beautiful child—now violated by bullet holes. You look at the delicate fingers and feel the cold. You cup her hand in yours desperately trying to will your warmth into her. Her dropped jaw speaks the ghastly truth. She is no longer alive. Your thoughts wandered to her baby teeth, and you remember your casual conversation with your neighbor about the orthodontics you think she might need in a few years' time.

Oh, if only you can have the blessed problem of orthodontics. Oh God! If only you can have not just the orthodontic problem but all the problems of raising her. Shopping for her clothes, helping her with homework, applying for college, meeting her future husband...

At a different time, another village wept for their loss. The soldiers came in and massacred baby boys two years and under. You, the parent, cannot help shaking from the helpless, hopeless nightmare of Herod's soldier thrusting his sword through your son.

*A voice was heard in Ramah
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,*

Because they were no more.

(Matthew 2: 18; cf. [Jeremiah 31: 15](#))

There is a national grief at the tragedy of the killing of children who are just out of their diapers. The horror is beyond words.

There will be many reasons to blame the killer's mother, the gun manufacturer, the video games, the right to bear arms in America, etc. We do not justify the killing in any way, and as we get more information, we will each begin to formulate our own thinking about the sequence of events leading to the killing and we may start assigning levels of responsibility to different people or policies in the chain of events.

We think of life as the supreme value because without life, there is no consciousness, and nothing else matters. Life is indeed of supreme worth. But we must not limit life to this existence alone.

No, I am not talking about heaven. When a person dies and his soul goes to heaven (or hell), he is conscious, but his body is still dead. That reality of death does not change. When Jesus came to give us eternal life, he was not talking about the soul going to heaven. If we strip away all the spin, the reality is that the person is gone from this world, the body lies dead, and even when the eye of faith sees the soul in heaven, the body is truly dead.

There is a debate in the Gospels between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The debate is: does the body rise again from the dead? There is no debate that there is a consciousness beyond death. The question is the nature of that consciousness. Would it be a soul floating about in ethereal space? Or would the dead body come back to life and walk this earth again? That is the question of the resurrection.

Jesus comes out strongly for the resurrection, which in this case, means the Pharisees were right and the Sadducees were wrong. Eternal life is not a soul living forever. The Apostle's Creed, the oldest Christian creed makes this clear: "I believe in ... the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Our salvation starts with the forgiveness of sin while in this life, continues with the resurrection of our body on the judgment day, and then in our resurrected body, we enjoy life everlasting. This has profound significance on how we understand death, and the death of little ones.

To every parent who has to bury a child, and to every person who has to bury a loved one, the Good News of Jesus Christ is that this body violated by crime, sickness, or decay will one day defeat that violation. This loved one will rise up from the dead with an incorruptible body.

The child who has died will be alive again. Christian parent, I do not know exactly how it will be because the word of God does not tell us, but what I know is that you will have your child again – free from the violation that took life away prematurely. Perhaps we will have opportunity to parent that child in the resurrected body. Perhaps all who have aborted their babies will have opportunity to make good the harm they did to their own flesh and blood.

The crown of life is not a crown you wear on your head. It is an expression meaning that we will be **crowned with life**. Life is of supreme value. Sin is the cause of all death, but there is forgiveness of sin because Jesus Christ died in our place to pay the penalty of our sin. The debt to sin (death), has been paid by Jesus.

Jesus arose from the dead to tell us that resurrection is real. Death cannot hold him because he is without sin. When we receive his gift of forgiveness, we too will rise from the dead because death cannot hold us. Like Jesus who went before us, we will move from death to life. He was the first to move in this opposite direction, and all who belong to him will do likewise. All life move towards death. But for the dead in Christ, we move from death to life.

True comfort for those who have lost their loved ones is to know that in-Christ, the dead shall live again. We shall live again, not in ethereal space as

disembodied spirits, but in our resurrected body. We will really conquer death and have real life.

What did Jesus mean when he said, "Permit the children to come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16)? Perhaps it suggests to us that in the resurrection, children who die here will be there running around until they grow up. Perhaps all the parenting we miss when they die young will be realized. I do not know, I am just guessing what it will be like for us in the resurrected body. The resurrected body does not decay, but does it also mean it will not grow from childhood? When we die at a ripe old age, will we look like the age we die, or at our prime?

There is much that we can speculate, but we need to accept that the everlasting life we have in Christ will be wonderful. It will be God's surprise gift to us, much more than we can imagine. So I feel at liberty to indulge a little, and imagine the best that I can think of, and then leave room for God's generosity that I cannot imagine.

What we do know is that we will have physical bodies like the resurrected body of Christ. What that means for children is unclear, and what that means for parents is also unclear.

But there is great comfort for parents to know that their children will be restored, not just turned into little puffs of

ethereal substances that float about. The salvation that Jesus provides is not vague. It is not a hope that we cling to because we are desperate. It is a hope that is demonstrated with power in the resurrection of Christ. It is a promise with a proof.

This promise is available to all who come to Jesus and receive it in faith. What does this mean? It is quite simple really. It means we want to move out of the kingdom of sin and death, and move into the kingdom of forgiveness and life. When our sins are forgiven, death loses its power over us, and we have the hope of resurrection. And how do you move into the kingdom of God where there is forgiveness of sin?

The Bible makes it clear and simple. It says, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, NASB). We need to tell God we are sorry for our sins, and turn from them. We are then to express our commitment to repentance through baptism, which publicly confesses our faith in Jesus Christ. When that happens, we will receive the Holy Spirit of God who lives in us and empowers us to live a new and everlasting life.

Everlasting life is the result of "forgiveness of sin" and "the resurrection of the body" (Apostles' Creed). When we have the blessed assurance of the resurrection, we will

possess the comfort that nothing else can bring.

Parents must be allowed to grieve when they lose their children. The initial pain knows no bounds. But when pain has done its worst and left a devastated emotional landscape, what is there to do to pick up the pieces?

King David lost his child. He prayed and fasted for the life of the child, but God did not save the child. After seven days, the child died. David arose and ended his fast. This puzzled his servants. If David was fasting when the child was alive, why would he now recover when the child is dead? And this was David's reply, "While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him, but he will not return to me**" (2 Sam 12:22-23, NASB).

King David had seven days to sort out his mind and his heart. When his child finally died, he found comfort that he will be reunited with his lost child beyond this life. It is the resurrection that makes this reunion possible and tangible.

Let us possess everlasting life by taking the first step: repent and be baptized. All the other things will follow naturally.

In the case of parents who grieve over the loss of their children, there is one parenting duty you have that extends beyond the grave. It is the life that extends beyond the grave. You must secure your own salvation so you will resurrect to everlasting life and be reunited with your child.



The Kingdom of heaven is such as these

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