

Because

...for anyone who's ever asked, 'why?'

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You Can't Take It With You

by James Henderson



Your money, that is.

And your riches. Your collections of this and that, those shoes you bought for a steal in the Black Friday sales, your rare prints and paintings, the bright sparkling diamonds that have been your best friend, the fine wines, the fashionable labradoodle¹, that priceless antique that's been in the family for generations: no, they'll all be left behind. All the trappings of your life... even the iphone that you can't live without!

The after-life (or is it after-death?) has been much in the news of late, but have you ever wondered why there is death in the first place? Where did it come from? What is it all about? If there is some continuing existence afterwards, why does life have to be punctuated by this thing called death?

But, can we really *not* take anything with us?

TUT, TUT!

If you were a king of ancient Egypt, you'd think that you could take most of your possessions with you. Did you watch the autumn TV series called *Tutankhamun*, which was based loosely on the 1922 discovery of the famous boy-King's tomb? You can still see his mummified remains in the spectacular Valley of Kings², where the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom tried to conceal their resting places from grave robbers instead of advertising their presence in the more obvious pyramid structures of previous rulers.

Archaeologist Howard Carter wrote that, on shining an electric torch through a peephole he made on the sealed doorway of the ante-chamber of Tutankhamun's tomb, he found himself *on the threshold of what might prove a magnificent discovery*. How right he was! On the following day, the 26th November, *at first he could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber*

causing the candle light to flicker, but presently, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues and gold – everywhere the glint of gold.³ Later, of course, Carter was to discover Tutankhamun's golden sarcophagus inlaid with precious jewels and coloured stones (pictured right).

The thought was that the king could make use of all this wealth in the shady and mysterious world to come. Some Pharaohs had their favourite pets, servants and even wives buried with them, just in case they had a future need for them. If you had been pharaoh, what items (or, whom!) would you have included in your list?

It's not just in Egypt that people went to such elaborate lengths to prepare for a life after this life. It happened in numerous cultures, be it in China (the Terracotta Army is a well-known example) to graves closer to home where, in past Anglo-Saxon and Celtic pagan cultures, those with wealth would often arrange to have their treasured goods buried with them.

A SLEEPY VILLAGE WAKES UP

Last summer something rare was found near the English village of Great Ryburgh in the county of Norfolk. It was an Anglo-Saxon cemetery dating back to the 7th to 9th centuries AD (or CE – Common Era – if you prefer). What is remarkable about it is how intact some of the tree-trunk coffins are due to the ideal preservation conditions of acidic sand and alkaline water at the excavation site.

Also, of interest to us, is the absence of personal possessions in the graves. Their occupants did not envisage taking anything with them into the afterlife, which points to this being a Christian burial site. This is further emphasized by the fact that the coffins faced east, indicative that the those who were placed in them anticipated what Christians call the Resurrection of the Dead.

Most Christians, Jews and Muslims believe that we can't take anything with us when we die. Jesus Christ told his followers not to *store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal*⁴. He also declared, *I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die*⁵, meaning that it is exclusively Christ who includes everyone in the hope of a life after death. A traditional Christian burial practice has been to lay graves facing the direction of the Mount



of Olives near Jerusalem because, in the words of a prophecy⁶, the Saviour (Jesus Christ) will appear there at the end of the world (grave on the mount of Olives pictured on opposite page).

COLD COMFORT

Nowadays, in contrast to the comfort that religion and faith may bring, we turn more to scientific possibilities. Therefore, some people are interested in Cryogenics, the idea of freezing our lifeless bodies in the hope that medical science will eventually find a way to re-activate them and to cure our terminal conditions. Perhaps, if we can't take our belongings with us, we can risk taking our physicality (and, by extension, hopefully our personality) with us. That is, if we can afford the hefty cost of being stored in a sealed frozen casket.

The desire to live forever or at least longer seems to be part of our psyche. One philosopher put it this way, *He (that is, God) has also set eternity in the human heart*⁷.

HOW DID DEATH BEGIN?

A lot has been written about how life began. How did it happen? Creation? Evolution following a Big Bang or some other causative effect(s)? No doubt in 2017 there will be more debates, speculations and theories on the origins of life and the universe, or multiverse as



we now think we know it to be.

But what about death? How did it originate? Is it just a natural part of the process of life? Is it as final as it seems to be? Can we establish a working theory of death?

In this short article, we can't cover the whole gamut of what the world's great thinkers say and have said about this. To a Buddhist, death is merely part of the impermanence of life, a transitional stage to an opportunity to make things better next time around, but how death itself came about is unclear. To an atheist it's a physical end to the process of existence, and just part of how life is. Scientists may describe death clinically in terms of brain function – *they believe that our mental and spiritual lives are wholly dependent on the working of our brains. On this account, when the brain dies, the stream of our being must come to an end*⁸ – but again the concept of “why so?” is mostly unaddressed. “Why death” remains one of philosophy's unanswered questions.

Christianity, however, suggests an answer and it may not be one that we like. But it does supply a plausible explanation and, also, a hope that death need not be the end of existence.

In the biblical book of *Genesis*, which means “beginnings”, humanity enters the world scene by having access to “the Tree of Life”⁹. Is this a literal tree or a symbolic one or both? We don't know. What we do know is that the first man and woman, called Adam and Eve, rejected the life-giving ways of God and pursued their own agenda, characterized by their eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The thought is that, out of their own free will, Adam and Eve moved away from God's good intentions for them. This movement away is called sin, and it is because of sin that death occurred. Note what the first century Christian writer, Paul, said when he wrote to the early believers in Rome: *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.*¹⁰

So, there we have it, according to the Bible. Death was not initially part of life, rather it flowed from a decision to move away from the source of life. It may now be part of the process of life, but it was not the original intent that it should be thus. *Sin results in a change from the relation of life to the relation of death.*¹¹

Death, both physical and spiritual, is the consequence of sin, and we have collectively brought it upon ourselves.

Must it, however, to be this way forever?

WILL DEATH DIE?

This is where the foresight and foreknowledge of God works for us. When you think of it, it makes sense. If there is a God, surely God would see and know things before we see or know them. If he couldn't, he would not be all powerful, and therefore wouldn't be God.

God knew that humanity would make a deadly choice, and in his love for us he planned a way to restore us to life. This is where Jesus comes in. The same Jesus we mentioned earlier, the one who is the Resurrection and the Life. He means our resurrection and our life. He means that he has destroyed any eternal hold we thought death had on us. Physically we may decay, but in Christ we become new again...a new creation.

In Jesus death dies.

So, what do we take with us when we die? The truth is that we don't take anything. The wonder of it all is that Jesus takes us, and he is ready to take us with him into his life, into a new adventure beyond our imagination. Not into a continuation of this life that might lead again to death, but into a completely different existence.

I wonder what that new life might be like. We can speculate but the reality is that we don't know. We go forward in faith that it will be so much more fulfilling than what fulfils us now.

It sounds intriguing, and overflowing with possibilities. The good things of life are like tasters of better things to come. Whatever lies ahead in eternity will be full of the joys of discovery.

That sounds great to me!

Notes:

- 1 A striking-looking dog that's half-labrador, half-poodle.
- 2 If you ever visit the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, Tutankhamun's tomb is number KV62.
- 3 Carter's words quoted from Chapter 3 of *Great Adventures in Archaeology from Belzoni to Woolley*, edited by Robert Silverberg and published in England by Penguin Books in 1985.
- 4 Matthew 6:19-21
- 5 John 11:25
- 6 Zechariah 14:4, *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.*
- 7 The biblical writer and philosopher, Solomon. Quoted from Ecclesiastes 3:11, *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*
- 8 Quoted from page 208 of *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris, published in 2005 in Great Britain by The Free Press.
- 9 Genesis 2:9, *The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*
- 10 Romans 5:12
- 11 Quoted from page 248 of *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* by Thomas F. Torrance and edited by Robert T. Walker, published in 2008 by Paternoster in the UK.

What happens to our body after death?

A major feature in the news last month was on a legal case involving cryogenics. A 14-year-old girl had requested, before she died of terminal cancer, for her body to be cryogenically frozen in the hope that in the future she could be cured and brought back to life. The case revolved around her parents' conflicting desires on whether to carry this out or have a traditional burial.

Is there hope for our body after death? In the future, will we be restored to our body after death such as this girl hopes?

Belief in a bodily resurrection is a key part of the Christian faith and gives hope for those facing death. The early Christian writer Paul wrote that 'we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus' (2 Cor 3:14 NRSV).

There is life after death in Christ, not in frozen slumber, but in his warm embrace.

Gavin Henderson from <http://www.because.uk.com/?p=3022>



In the Midst of War, Who Feeds the Cats?

by Janie Gadsden

(Our hearts go out to the people of Aleppo in Syria where, at the time of going to press, the fighting has intensified and so many have lost their lives. The following article highlights a story that was reported by various news agencies.)

Almost daily we hear of the atrocities happening in Aleppo, of the wounded who are attempting to try and live in a war zone and also, of the deeply sad losses of those who are dying in an attempt to find a better life across the ocean.

From the way this news is delivered to us through the media, it seems impossible that there is any good happening, but, because of the humanity that lives in us, good things are being done for others in this unforgiving environment!

In the midst of war and fear, there are many who have fled Aleppo, some without a thought for their pet, others have agonised over the sadness of leaving their precious feline friend/s. The latter was the case for one little girl. In her distress her parents found out about a man dubbed “The Cat Man of Aleppo”! Over the last 2-3 years his home has become a sanctuary for any cat, whether it’s a stray or like the little girl’s, which was lovingly brought to him to be cared for.

The sanctuary came to be by accident, as the cats just started arriving at his house at dinner time. Then people started bringing them to him, knowing they would be looked after and cared for. Now, it is an official sanctuary with over 170 cats, all in the middle of a city under siege.

For the little girl, the Cat Man of Aleppo - Mohammed

Alas Jaleel (pictured); takes photos of her pet and emails them to her parents, who have all found safety and a new life in Turkey.

The time that Mohammed doesn’t use looking after the cats, he is a ambulance driver! The sanctuary thrives on people’s generous donations alone, which he uses to pay for cat food in the form of leftovers at the meat market. Some of the money that he hasn’t used for the cats, he used to sponsor a park for the children right next to the sanctuary, so the children could also come to see the cats after school. No wonder Mohammed’s other nickname is “The Angel of Aleppo”!



This man, has blessed a little girl with the peace of mind that her feline friend will be cared for. But he has also blessed the community around him.

He intends on staying for the cats, no matter what happens. He has said there is no one else to feed and care for them, so he will stay. What a selfless thing to do! So often, too often, we hear of man’s selfishness and lack of care for others, let alone care for animals.

But we can always try to be that person who reacts differently. So, is there a war happening in your world where you can ‘feed the cats’ - where you can bless others and feed them with selflessness? Could you selflessly stick around for someone in a difficult situation? There may well be an opportunity today.

Editor’s update: since this article was written there have been reports that the sanctuary was largely destroyed during a bombing raid, but that Mohammed Alas Jaleel and his family survived and that he sought to create a new shelter for the remaining cats.



Britain, are we half-baked?

Now, before we answer that question with a spoonful of meta-cognition in the annually awkward ritual of reflecting on our life, resulting in unrealistic goals for the new year... let us first turn to the cooking earthquake that was dished up for us this summer concerning one of Britain's most cherished institutions: The Great British Bake Off.

You may have gotten a sprinkling of the news. Yes, our beloved bake off is moving channels – from BBC One to Channel 4! And, unfortunately, in the switching of broadcasting ovens some key ingredients will be sieved out...

The new series will be Mel-Sue-and-Mary-less. No longer will they be the Wednesday evening companions for some 14 million people who witnessed Candice Brown win the final this year. But before our hearts are deflated too much, our good old Paul Hollywood will still be there to whisk our post BBC woes into wetted appetites once again.

But back to the question I asked at the beginning. I'm sure the new series will bring more cakes and catastrophes, but have you ever eaten a half-baked cake?

I want to invite you into my world as I, literally, type this article. In the most interesting twists of irony, as I sat to write to you, my next door neighbour brought me a cake her son made...(here's the picture!) Excuse me while I take a bit...



(.....yum, yum.....)

Ok...fork down...I'm *bake* with you (...sorry, I'm mean *back!*). It's delicious: moist; sweet, but not too much; soft, with a hint of strawberry in the sponge. I'm ever so sorry I can't share it with you!!!

But I can tell you, my taste buds would have had a different experience if the cake was half-baked – sticky, thick and doughy. I suspect not even our 2016 winner Candice would have been able to resurrect it.

But rolling pins aside, I want to seriously ask you, and by extension, this nation a question...

Are you half-baked?

I'm not talking cakes now, I'm talking character! I'm talking about the imminent New Year's resolutions you may be thinking about making.

And so was another writer 2700 years ago who probably had to cook for himself as his wife was running off with other men! Hosea was his name, and he liked to use cooking analogies to make a point about the character of an ancient nation that were not so good at keeping their promises. He said of them, "Ephraim is a cake unturned" (Hosea 7:8). Not quite the everyday put down you and I are used to hearing, but this was an ancient culinary criticism that needs to be tested in the kitchen of our character...

Are we half-turned, so that only one side of our life gets baked through, gets changed? Does the heat of our New Year's commitment get to all sides of our life? Does the temperature of our New Year's zeal and effort get turned down because we leave the oven door of our heart open?

If the answer is yes, don't worry, it was the same story for the people to whom Hosea wrote: "They prepare their heart like an oven," he said, and so do we. At the beginning of 2017 our heart will be pumped up reading to stop drinking too much; to stop smoking; to contact that person you really should have spoken to a long time ago. Or, even to start answering those bigger questions in life about God. But keep the oven of your heart on so that your promises can bake through.

And so, to help you achieve this, here's a 3-step cooking method to help your character become fully baked as you start the New Year:

1. **Write your new goals down:** those who write their goals down are more likely to achieve them. It makes them real and creates accountability (even if it is to a piece of paper).

2. **Short term measurements:** give yourself weekly targets, not monthly, this will help with motivation. It is all about marginal gains – when you see progress you will start to believe you *can* sustain this change.

3. **Get help:** make things easy for yourself. If you want to remember to re-use your supermarket bag instead of paying another 5p for it, then stash a few in your car. If you struggle with alcoholic drink, only drink around friends. Remember, when Hosea was trying to get a nation to change he noticed "None among them calls upon Me [God]." So, call on God for help.

Don't forget, sometimes the ingredients of our decisions don't come together to produce the results we would like. That's life, don't give up! If you trip up, keep going. All 'fail' means is, 'First Attempt In Learning'. Get right back to the mixing bowl of your life and keep trying.

And if you are stuck for what New Year's resolution you can make, let me give you one from the ingredient list of our ancient prophet Hosea, "seek Him [God] for all this" (Hosea 7:10).

Seek God in 2017.

Make that change today!

References:

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Speaking of Life:



Do versus Don't in 2017

Have you ever tried to lose weight? It's a lot harder than it seems. You fight hard to eat healthy only to slip up at dinner and order a slice of cake. How does this happen? Paul talks about it in Romans: "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15).

As long as we inhabit mortal bodies, we experience the push and pull of our conflicting desires. We try to "just will ourselves through it." But it's not that simple. Our wills are only as strong as the desires driving them. When this dynamic is applied to our spiritual lives, the results can be frustrating and confusing. We might want to spend more time in prayer, to serve more, or to act more lovingly to our friends or spouses in an effort to be more like Christ, but our sinful nature influences our will — resulting in a lot of conflict.

But there's good news. A wise man once told me that the difference between Jesus and religion, when it comes to the problem of sin, is that religion says, "do," but Jesus says, "done." In his sacrificial work on the cross, the question of our sin has been answered forever.

Now, this doesn't mean the process of becoming more

like Jesus won't be difficult, or that we won't mess up. But it does mean that we can wage this battle daily in full confidence of its outcome: Jesus wins, every time. In fact, he already has! We remain his beloved children and he has promised, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

As Calvin used to say, it takes perseverance and patience, repentance and renewal, mortification and vivification.

But when we stand firm in God's completed work for us, and realize that the impossible task we must "do" has already been "done," we truly begin to walk in his resurrection power and life. What Christ has done for us, the Holy Spirit will work out in us, and in his time and in his way, God will bring it to completion.



I'm Joseph Tkach, speaking of LIFE.

Speaking of Life is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.

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